

## The myth of Khatyn

The main myth of the Belarusian village of Khatyn, destroyed by German punitive forces, is the assertion of Soviet propaganda that it was a crime against humanity aimed at the destruction of the Belarusian people. Khatyn was chosen by Soviet propaganda from hundreds of villages destroyed by the Germans in the course of punitive operations, according to the consonance of its name with Katyn, where the NKVD shot Polish officers. If Soviet citizens heard anything about the crime at Katyn, they often confused it with the Belarusian tragedy of Khatyn. In 1966, by decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belarus, a memorial was erected in Khatyn in memory of 186 Belarusian villages burned by the German invaders. The prototype was one of the few survivors - the local blacksmith Iosif Kaminsky, who had to carry his dying son in his arms. The opening of the memorial took place in July 1969. At the same time, the age of the victims, originally indicated on the tablets, was subsequently left only for women, children and the elderly. It was removed from men of military age, who accounted for up to a quarter of the 149 victims. The village of Khatyn, Logoisk district, Minsk region, Belarus,

was burned on March 22, 1943 by soldiers of the 118th Ukrainian security police battalion, which was in German service, and a special German battalion of the general SS "Dirlewanger", formed from former criminals. Among those burned in Khatyn were women, children, the elderly, as well as a significant number of Red Army soldiers who were encircled or escaped from captivity. It is possible that some of them were partisans. All of them were accused of aiding the partisans. Some of the unfortunate were shot, others were burned alive in their homes. On the morning of March 22, 6 km from Khatyn, near the village of B. Guba, partisans of the Avenger detachment, commanded by A. Morozov, attacked a car and killed the German captain Hans Welke, the famous German athlete, who at the 1936 Olympic Games brought Germany the first gold medal in shot put. According to German

documents, the 118th security battalion was transferred to Belarus only in July 1943 and could not participate in the punitive operation in Khatyn. Soviet collaborators also served in the Dirlewanger battalion, and they could be mistaken for fighters of the 118th security battalion. Probably, only the 1st company of the 118th battalion operated in the Khatyn region, which could have been transferred to Belarus as early as March. Later in August 1944, the 118th battalion went over to the side of the French partisans, where it formed the backbone of the 2nd Taras

Shevchenko Ukrainian Battalion. Many members of this battalion later served in the French Foreign Legion. Nevertheless, after the war, a number of soldiers and officers of the 118th battalion were sentenced to death or long-term imprisonment for this crime, although they denied participation in the operation in Khatyn. In particular, in December 1986, the former head of the 118th battalion, Grigory Vasyura, was sentenced to death in Minsk, although he was not in Khatyn. The German report on the action in the Khatyn region was compiled by Police Major Erich Kerner on April 12, 1943. According to him, after the murder of Velke and three Ukrainian policemen, after a short battle with two platoons of the 1st company of the 118th battalion, they retreated east, to Khatyn. After that, "on the way back, the loggers were

arrested, because there was a suspicion that they were aiding the enemy. A little north of B. Guba, some of the captured workers tried to escape. At the same time, 23 people were killed by our fire. The rest of the arrested were taken for interrogation to the gendarmerie in Pleschenitsy. But since their guilt could not be proved, they were released. To pursue the retreating enemy, larger forces were sent, including units of the SS battalion "Dirlewanger". The enemy, meanwhile, withdrew to the village of Khatyn, known for its friendliness to the bandits. The village was surrounded and attacked from all sides. At the same time, the enemy offered stubborn resistance and fired from all the houses, so heavy weapons had to be used - anti-tank guns and heavy mortars.

During the hostilities, along with 34 bandits, many were killed. villagers. Some of them died in the flames."

And here is a partisan report on these events: "03/22/43, who were in an ambush on the Logoisk-Pleschenitsy highway, the first and third companies destroyed a passenger car, two gendarmerie officers were killed, several policemen were wounded. After leaving the ambush site, the companies settled in the village of Khatyn, Pleshchenitsky District, where they were surrounded by Germans and policemen. When leaving the encirclement, three people were killed, four were wounded. After the battle, the Nazis burned

the village of Khatyn. Detachment commander A. Morozov, chief of staff S. Prochko. Apparently, most civilians and a significant number of partisans died during the battle, including in houses set on fire by artillery. Many civilians were also shot after the battle by the SS and Ukrainian police, who were avenging Velka's death. SS-Oberführer Oskar Dirlewanger died in July 1945 in the French POW camp at Althausen. In fact, the tragedy in Khatyn was a typical war crime, but not at all a crime against humanity, which was the Soviet crime in Katyn.

## The myth of the Citadel

The main myth of the German "Citadel", The an operation common in Soviet and Russian historiography, lies in the fact that during this operation the German command pursued the goal of achieving a decisive victory on the Eastern Front and, after the destruction of Soviet troops in the Kursk salient, it was supposed to organize an attack on Moscow. Another myth is that the method of deliberate defense chosen by the Soviet Headquarters on the Kursk ledge in the conditions of the overall superiority of the Red Army in people and equipment turned out to be optimal and allowed the Germans to inflict heavy losses in armored vehicles, which were at least no less than the losses of the Soviet troops. During Operation Citadel, it was

supposed to strike in converging directions from Orel and Belgorod to Kursk in order to encircle the main forces of the Central Front, General Rokossovsky and the Voronezh Front, General Vatutin. Hitler signed the corresponding directive on 15 April. The earliest date for the start of the offensive was set for May 3, weather permitting. Then it was repeatedly postponed, as Hitler sought to replenish the troops as much as possible with people and equipment, including new Tiger and Panther tanks, Ferdinand self-propelled guns and Focke Wulf-190 fighters. Manstein, on the contrary, believed that Citadel had the best chance of success if it had begun as early as possible, preferably no later than mid-May, before the Russians had time to strengthen their positions and bring up reserves. The success of the Citadel, according to Hitler's plan, was to rule out a large-scale Soviet offensive in 1943. After that, the German command expected to transfer significant forces of the army and the Luftwaffe from the Eastern Front in order to repel the proposed invasion of Anglo-American troops into Italy or France. The start date for Citadel has been pushed back several times. It was not until July 1 that Hitler set a deadline of July 5. He stated that

a new defeat would deprive the Red Army of the opportunity to carry out active operations in 1943. By this time, the strategic position of Germany and its allies had deteriorated significantly. On May 13, 1943, the German-Italian troops surrendered in Tunisia. About 90 thousand Germans and 150 thousand Italians were taken prisoner. Now Anglo-American troops could land in Sicily and the Apennine Peninsula at any moment. But Hitler hoped that he could defeat the Soviet armies at Kursk before the Western Allies landed in Italy, and transfer the forces released after the elimination of the Kursk salient to the Mediterranean theater to repel the expected invasion of Italy. Both the Soviet Headquarters and the command of the Voronezh and Central Fronts had no doubt that the Germans in the spring-summer

campaign of 1943 would advance in the Kursk Bulge area, where significant Red Army forces could be surrounded. A strong defense was prepared. The density of mining was four times greater than during the defense of Stalingrad. Taking into account the Steppe Front of General Konev, the Soviet troops opposing the Citadel numbered 1,910 thousand people, more than 8 thousand tanks and

self-propelled guns, more than 31 thousand guns and mortars, 3.6 thousand aircraft. The Germans had about 780 thousand people, 2758 tanks and assault guns, 7417 guns and mortars, 1781 combat aircraft.

By the end of June, the Headquarters began to lean towards the fact that if the Germans did not launch an offensive in the first half of June, then the Red Army would have to strike first. The beginning of the offensive of the Central Front was scheduled for July 14, and the Voronezh Front - for July 20.

From the captured prisoners, and also due to the fact that on July 4 the troops of the 4th Panzer Army of Army Group South conducted a strong reconnaissance in force to capture a ridge of heights in the Tomarovka area, the Soviet command became aware that the German offensive would begin on the morning of July 5. On the night of July 5, the artillery of the Central and Voronezh fronts at 22.30 and 2.20 Moscow time conducted artillery counter-preparation. Its purpose was to disrupt or at least delay the start of the German offensive. 0.25 ammunition was used up. However, the enemy suffered only minor losses in manpower and almost no losses in artillery and equipment. This was explained as poor reconnaissance of targets,

because of which the fire had to be fired at the squares, and the fact that the German tanks at the time of counter-preparation were still in shelters and did not come under attack. An unsuccessful air raid was also carried out by the forces of the 2nd and 17th air armies (417 attack aircraft and fighters) on the Kharkov and Belgorod enemy air hubs. German airfields and aircraft there suffered only minor damage, with 120 Soviet aircraft shot down. German radar stations warned the Luftwaffe command in advance about the approach of the Soviet armada, and it was met by Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulfs on the outskirts of the airfields. Since almost all German aircraft were in the air, our attack aircraft were able to damage mainly the airfield buildings and a few out-of-service aircraft.

The German offensive began an hour later than planned.  
because of the fear that the Soviet troops themselves would go on the offensive.

Model's 9th Army concentrated its main forces on a front of just over 40 km, at the shortest distance to Kursk, against General Nikolai Pukhov's 13th Army. This was the only direction where, according to the conditions of the terrain, tanks could be widely used. But it was here that Rokossovsky was expecting the main blow, so he strengthened Pukhov's army and placed his reserves behind it. German aviation

dominated the air. This was achieved through the centralized use of aviation, as well as the maximum use of each aircraft (sometimes one aircraft could make 2-3 sorties per day) due to the most rational placement of field airfields. So, during the Battle of Kursk, German field airfields were located only 18-30 km from the front line, while Soviet field airfields were located 40-60 km from the front line, also out of fear that if they were closer to the front line, they would be subjected to more intense influence from the air-dominated Luftwaffe. Each German aircraft had a transceiver station, and the German units of the first line also had special air controllers equipped with means of communication both with the headquarters of the air groups assigned to this sector of the front, and with the commanders of the air squadrons located in this

moment in the air. In the Soviet fighter and attack aircraft operating over the battlefield, radio transmitters, at best, were placed on the planes of squadron commanders and higher, and ordinary pilots had only receivers. There were no advanced air controllers in the Red Army at all.

The Soviet command scattered its forces, forcing a significant part of the fighters to barrage over areas that were not threatened from the air. The Germans, on the other hand, threw all their fighters into the area of the main strike in order to purposefully search for Soviet fighters and destroy them even on approaching the battlefield. On the Central Front, 88 serviceable German Focke-Wulfs and Messerschmitts easily defeated 511 serviceable Soviet fighters. The situation in the air and on the Voronezh front was no better. Assessing the work of the fighters of the 2nd Air Army of the Voronezh Front in the defensive operation on the southern face of the Kursk Bulge, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Red Army Air Force, Lieutenant General of Aviation N.I. when our fighters were not in those zones where the situation required, did not look for the enemy, acted passively, or simply ironed the air aimlessly. And as a result, "separate groups of bombers got the opportunity to bomb our ground troops with impunity."

By the end of July 6, the Soviet front had been broken through by Model 32 km wide and up to 10 km deep, but at least 16 km remained to be broken through. In total, on the northern face of the Kursk Bulge, by July 11, the Germans managed to advance 6-15 km.

The terrain on the southern face of the Kursk Bulge, to a much greater extent than on the northern, contributed to the use of large tank formations. The main blow by the forces of the 4th Panzer Army Gotha Manstein delivered in the Oboyan direction against the 6th Guards Army, and the auxiliary one - by the Kempf army group in the Korochansky direction, against the 7th Guards Army. On the first day, Goth's army managed to advance 8 km deep into the Soviet defenses and capture the village of Cherkasskoye. By the end of the first day of the offensive, a penetration into the defenses of the 6th Guards Army was achieved to a depth of 5-6 km in the offensive zone of the 48th Corps near

Cherkassky and at 12–13 km in the lane of the II SS Corps in the Bykovka-Kozmo-Demyanovka area. In the motorized division "Grossdeutschland", the 48th Corps was given a regiment of 200 "panthers", which often failed for technical reasons. During the "Citadel" 42 "panthers" were lost, during the subsequent defensive battles for Belgorod and Kharkov - another 85 vehicles.

By July 12, the Germans advanced 35 km and broke through all three defense lines of the Voronezh Front in the Prokhorovka area. Here, on July 12, Vatutin launched a counterattack by the 5th Guards Division of General Alexei Zhadov and the 5th Guards Tank Division of General Pavel Rotmistrov, which ended in complete failure. On July 10, the Allies carried out a successful landing in Sicily. More importantly, on July 11, the troops of the Western Front, General Vasily Sokolovsky and the Bryansk Front, General Markian Popov, began a large-scale reconnaissance in force against the Oryol bridgehead. Model already on the evening of July 11 stopped the offensive and began to transfer divisions of the shock group to repel the Soviet offensive.

On July 13, Hitler summoned von Manstein and von Kluge to Headquarters in East Prussia and said that in connection with the successful landing of the Allies in Sicily and the beginning of the Soviet offensive on the Oryol bridgehead, he was stopping the Citadel and transferring the SS Panzer Corps to Italy. Manstein insisted on continuing the offensive with his army group and demanded the transfer to him of the 24th tank corps, which was in the reserve of the OKH and numbered 140 tanks.

Hitler rejected this request, but allowed the use of the SS Panzer Corps in order to try to bleed the Soviet troops on the southern face of the Kursk salient as much as possible. Only the Leibstandarte went to Italy, while the other two SS divisions, together with the corps headquarters, remained on the Eastern Front for the time being. They had to be used to eliminate the Soviet bridgehead on the Mius River, created as a result of the offensive of the Southern Front, which began on July 16. And the 24th Panzer Corps was sent to the Seversky Donets, where the Southwestern Front

launched an offensive. The Central Front was supposed to go on the offensive earlier than the Voronezh Front, so at Rokossovsky at the time of the s



The Citadel had a breakthrough artillery corps at hand and much more ammunition than Vatutin had. It is no coincidence that in the course of the defensive operation the Central Front fired two and a half times more shells than the Voronezh Front.

In addition, the length of the tank-hazardous areas on the Voronezh Front was twice as high as on the Central Front. On the southern face of the Kursk Bulge, the Germans had 300 more tanks than on the northern. The elite SS Panzer Corps and the Grossdeutschland Division also advanced here. The 9th

German Army during the offensive lost 3,300 people killed and 17,390 wounded and missing. The total number of killed and missing in Model's army can be estimated at 4 thousand people. The Central Front during this time lost 86 thousand people, including about 5 thousand prisoners and about 50 thousand killed. The ratio for total losses is 4.2:1, and for irretrievable - 13.6:1. Between July 5 and July 13, the troops of

Army Group South took 24,000 prisoners, and between July 13 and 16, another 10,000, mainly during the liquidation of the "cauldron" in the Shakhovo region. The total losses of the Voronezh Front in the period from July 4 to July 16, 1943 can be estimated at 133.4 thousand people. Irretrievable losses amounted to 86.1 thousand, including about 52 thousand killed. Army Group South suffered 34,236 casualties between 4 and 20 July, including 5,699 killed, 1,203 missing and 27,817 wounded. In the period up to July 16, the loss of Manstein's troops probably amounted to about 26 thousand people, including about 5.5 thousand killed and missing. The ratio for total losses is 5.1:1, and for irretrievable losses - 15.9:1. In total, on the northern face of the Kursk Bulge,

from July 5 to 14, the German 9th Army irretrievably lost 88 tanks and assault guns (including 4 "Tigers" and 19 "Ferdinands"), and on the southern face of the arc, from July 5 to On July 17, the troops of the Army Group "South" irretrievably lost 190 tanks, assault guns and self-propelled guns (including 6 "tigers" and 44 "panthers"). The troops of the Voronezh Front during the defensive battle near Kursk from July 5 to July 17 irretrievably lost 1886 tanks and self-propelled guns. This gives a ratio of irretrievable losses in armored vehicles of 9.9: 1 in favor of the Germans. Dead Losses

The Central Front in armored vehicles can be estimated at 558 tanks and self-propelled guns, which gives a ratio of 6.3:1.

In July and August 1943, according to German archival data, the Luftwaffe lost 3,213 combat vehicles, including 1,030 in the East. During Operation Citadel and the subsequent retreat of German troops to previously occupied positions, the Luftwaffe irretrievably lost about 390 vehicles, and the Soviet Air Force - more than one thousand. It should be said that the Luftwaffe very actively helped their troops, while the Soviet bombers almost did not leave the airfields. In fact, the main task of the "Citadel" was the grinding of Soviet operational and strategic reserves in order to prevent the subsequent transition of Soviet troops to the

offensive in the southern and central sectors of the front. This plan was only partially successful. Soviet troops were thoroughly battered, but not destroyed. Accordingly, the Soviet offensive was only delayed, not prevented, and its potential results were reduced. If the Soviet troops were the first to go on the offensive, it is likely that the ratio of losses would be more favorable for them, since they would have the initiative and themselves would try to choose the weakest places in the enemy's defense. German tank groups then could not have acted so effectively.

## The myth of the battle of Prokhorov

The main myth of the tank battle at Prokhorovka is that the forces and losses of the parties in the tanks were approximately equal, and the result of this battle was the stop of the German offensive against the Voronezh Front and the collapse of the Citadel.

On July 12, 1943, the largest tank battle of the Second World War took place near the Prokhorovka station south of Kursk. Paul Hausser's 2nd SS Panzer Corps had 273 combat-ready tanks and assault guns, as well as 38 Marder self-propelled guns. He was opposed by the 5th Guards Tank Army of General Pavel Rotmistrov, reinforced by the 2nd Guards Tank and 2nd Tank Corps, and the 5th Guards Army of General Alexei Zhadov. In total, Rotmistrov had 860 tanks and self-propelled guns, of which about 600 were directly involved in the battle. The commander of the Voronezh Front, Vatutin, expected on the first day to push the enemy back 25 km and break the main striking force of Army Group South - the SS Panzer Corps. But the troops that launched the counterattack did not have time to conduct reconnaissance of enemy positions and reconnaissance of the area. Rotmistrov, for example, did not know that there was an anti-tank ditch in the rear of the German positions, dug out during the preparations for repelling the German offensive.

Hausser feared for the flanks of the Leibstandarte Division, which had advanced far towards Prokhorovka. Therefore, the offensive of this division and the SS division "Reich" was postponed until the offensive of the division "Totenkopf" on the bridgehead behind Psel eliminated the threat to the left flank of the "Leibstandarte" and weakened Soviet resistance. If Hausser feared a Soviet counterattack, it was only on the Reich front. Perhaps that is why the offensive of this division on July 12 began rather late. So, if the counterattack of the 5th Guards Tank Army had taken place according to the original plan of Vatutin with the introduction of the main forces to Yakovlevo, where the Reich division was defending, it would have ended just as disastrously. The Germans expected this blow, and the terrain there was more difficult for tank operations.

Rotmistrov, on the other hand, insisted on delivering the main blow in the Prokhorovka area, where the Leibstandarte was defending. The 29th Tank Corps of the 5th Guards Tank Army advanced directly from the Prokhorovka station on both sides of the railway and along it, in a 3.5 km strip between the Oktyabrsky state farm and the Yamki farm. The 18th Panzer Corps of the same army advanced to the right of the 29th Panzer Corps, in a 2.5 km wide strip between the Oktyabrsky state farm and the Psel River. Both corps fell upon the Leibstandarte, which was defending at a front of 5 km.

During the battle near Prokhorovka, the Germans concentrated the main forces of their aviation here. In this area, 400 out of a total of 546 German sorties recorded that day on the Voronezh Front were noted. Soviet planes almost did not attack the enemy. Actually, on the field near Prokhorovka, the SS Leibstandarte division

fought against the 18th and 29th tank corps and the 9th Guards Airborne Division. The Leibstandarte had 56 combat-ready tanks (including 4 Tigers, 47 T-4s and 5 T-3s), 10 Shtug assault guns and 20 Marder anti-tank self-propelled guns. In the 18th Tank Corps, by the beginning of the battle, there were 68 T-34s, 18 Mk-4 Churchills, 58 T-70s, and in the 29th Tank Corps -

122 T-34s, 70 T-70s and 2 ° ACS (11 SU-122 and 9 SU-76). In total, two corps had 336 tanks and 2 ° SAU, including 190 T-34s. The result was sad for the Soviet side. The total irretrievable losses in the armored vehicles of the 18th and 29th tank corps in the

Prokhorov battle on July 12, 1943 can be determined as approximately equal to 276 tanks and 19 self-propelled guns. The Leibstandarte, on July 12-13, irretrievably lost 2 T-4 tanks. Another 15 T-4s and 1 T-3 were sent for medium-term repairs, and 2 T-4s and 2 T-3s for long-term repairs. The huge irretrievable losses of Soviet tanks were caused both by the fact that the battlefield was left to the Germans, and by the fact that the evacuation and

repair of damaged equipment were poorly organized in the Soviet tank forces. When the Soviet repairmen came to the territory left by the Germans, where the main forces of the 5th Guards Tank Army were killed, they managed to find only one damaged Soviet tank that could be repaired.

In the battle near Prokhorovka on July 12, the largest irretrievable losses in armored vehicles from the German side were suffered by the 6th tank company of the Leibstandarte, which suffered the main blow of the Soviet tank armada. This company was commanded by the son of the Reich Foreign Minister Rudolf von Ribbentrop. Two tanks of his company, just going on the attack, were destroyed. But Ribbentrop's own T-4 tank managed to fit into the battle formation of Soviet tanks and destroy 14 of them before his tank was damaged. Only in this case there was something similar to an oncoming battle.

In total, on July 12, 1943, the 2nd SS Panzer Corps irrevocably lost 3 tanks and 1 Marder self-propelled guns, and another 43 tanks and 12 assault guns needed long-term repairs. The 5th Guards Tank Army lost 343 tanks and self-propelled guns that day. The SS lost on 12 July 149 killed, 33 missing and 660 wounded. The 5th Guards Tank and 5th Guards Armies on that day in the battle near Prokhorovka lost more than 10 thousand killed, missing and captured. The SS Corps took 968 prisoners. In reports to Headquarters, Vatutin and Vasilevsky tried to spread their losses over two days - July 12 and 13, although on July 13 Rotmistrov's army practically did not fight. Stalin appointed a special commission, headed by GKO member Georgy Malenkov, to investigate the excessive losses of tanks in the Battle of Prokhorovka. But its materials are still classified and inaccessible to researchers. The outcome of the battle was also affected by the fact

that the Germans commander and gunner were separated. The tank commander was looking for targets, and the gunner was shooting. In Soviet tanks, the commander acted as a gunner, so he had very little time to look for targets and observe the battlefield. In addition, due to an acute shortage of communications, radio stations were not installed on all Soviet tanks, but only on the tanks of unit commanders. The rest of the tanks had only radios. After the death of the unit commander's tank, none of the crew commanders could take control of the unit any longer.

Another reason for the very high losses was the relatively low level of training of Soviet crews, especially driver mechanics, who until the end of 1942 had practice

driving from 5 to 10 hours, while for confident control of the tank, the required minimum was 25 hours. A negative role

was also played by the fact that on September 19, 1942, Stalin issued a special order ordering tanks to conduct artillery fire mainly on the move and without fail to install additional fuel tanks on the armor to increase the cruising range. Since stabilizers that made it possible to conduct aimed fire from a tank on the move appeared only in the 50s, Stalin's order doomed tankers to useless waste of shells. Additional fuel tanks turned the tank into a fire when hit by a bullet or shrapnel. The Germans refused to continue the offensive, not because of the battle they won at Prokhorovka. Just on July

12, Soviet troops went on the offensive on the northern face of the Kursk salient, and it became clear that it would not be possible to encircle the Soviet troops in the Kursk salient. Therefore, from Prokhorovka, the SS tank corps was transferred to eliminate the "cauldron" near Shakhov, where five divisions of the 69th Army were surrounded. With heavy losses, on July 16 they were able to break through to their own. On July 17, Army Group South began a retreat to the positions they had occupied before the start of the Citadel.

## **The myth of the Soviet counter-offensive on the Kursk salient**

The myth of the Soviet counter-offensive on the Kursk Bulge, which resulted in the liberation of Orel, Belgorod and Kharkov, is the assertion that Soviet troops were able to defeat the main forces of Army Groups Center and South, and that this was only possible because the German troops were weakened as a result of the previous offensive during Operation Citadel.

On July 13, 1943, the troops of the Bryansk and Western fronts broke through the enemy defenses. On July 15, the Central Front joined the offensive. His troops were significantly weakened during the German offensive on Kursk and did not have time to regroup and prepare a deep flank attack. Rokossovsky believed that it would be better to launch only two attacks on Bryansk from the north and south, with a corresponding regrouping of the Western and Central Fronts. But the operation began too hastily, and the German troops were only forced out of the Oryol ledge, but not defeated. In addition, the Headquarters did not take into account that the German troops defending the Oryol ledge were reinforced by divisions participating in the Citadel. The Soviet command did not dare to postpone the attack on the Bryansk and Western fronts, since the troops on the Kursk ledge, under strong German pressure, found themselves in a difficult situation. As a result, the Central Front had to advance in the unfavorable for the offensive grouping, which had developed during the defensive battle.

On July 18, the troops of the Central Front restored the position they had occupied before the start of the Citadel. But the 13th Army, which suffered the greatest losses during the defensive battles, advanced unsuccessfully and by the end of the day on July 20 was forced to go on the defensive.

Only on July 26 did the German command decide to leave the Oryol bridgehead and begin a retreat to the Hagen defensive line (east of Bryansk). On the evening of that day, the Stavka handed over to Rokossovsky the 3rd Guards Tank Army of Pavel Rybalko, in the hope that it would be possible to develop a breakthrough and surround the enemy.

However, the tankers, having suffered heavy losses, only slowly pushed the enemy out of the Oryol ledge.

On August 5 Oryol was released. On August 6, the 2nd and 3rd Guards Tank Armies began to pursue, but did not achieve success. On the contrary, on August 10, in a battle near Hill 264.6, the 3rd Guards Tank Army lost 110 tanks, including 100 irrevocably, and was withdrawn to the rear for replenishment.

The start of the offensive of the Voronezh and Steppe fronts was postponed until August 3, as the rear services were not ready, and the troops suffered heavy losses in men and military equipment during the reflection of the Citadel.

During the counter-offensive in the Belgorod-Kharkov direction, Soviet troops had overwhelming superiority over the enemy. Going on the offensive on August 3 on the southern face of the Kursk Salient, they were to capture Kharkov, the industrial capital of Ukraine. The main forces of the troops of the Voronezh and Steppe fronts from the areas north and northwest of Belgorod struck at the junction of the 4th German Panzer Army and the Kempf task force, and then had to envelop and defeat the Kempf group in the Kharkov region, which Hitler ordered to defend through thick and thin. The density of artillery in the direction of the main attacks of the

Voronezh and Steppe fronts reached 230 barrels per kilometer of the front. According to Konev, the Soviet troops outnumbered the enemy in artillery in a ratio of 6.5:1. According to Manstein, the Soviet troops outnumbered his army group by a ratio of 7:1. Manstein was right. If the German troops defending the Kharkov bridgehead (operational group "Kempf" and the 4th Panzer Army) numbered 200 thousand people, then the troops of the Voronezh and Steppe Fronts by the beginning of the Belgorod-Kharkov operation had 1,144 thousand soldiers and officers, and during offensive, they were reinforced by three more combined arms armies. They had four times more tanks than the Germans. On August 7, the tankers of the 1st Panzer Army of Katukov captured the important railway junction of Bogodukhov with a swift blow, where large reserves of fuel fell into their hands. With the loss of Bogodukhov, the Belgorod-Kharkov group of Germans found itself



split in two. The paths from Kharkov to the northwest were cut. The main communication from Kharkov to Poltava was also under threat. At dawn on August 8, the SS Panzer Division "Reich" from the

Olypan region attacked Bogodukhov, forcing them to go on the defensive at the line of Krysino, Maksimovka, Vel. Rogozyanka of the 3rd mechanized and 31st tank corps. On August 11, the troops of the Voronezh Front cut the Kharkov-Poltava railway. But by the end of the day, the enemy broke

through to the rear of the 1st Panzer Army, which had reached the railroad in the Vysokopole region. Soviet tankers were surrounded.

However, thanks to the counterattack of the reserves of the Voronezh Front to At the end of the day on August 12, the SS men were forced to withdraw.

On August 18, in the Akhtyrka area, the 7th, 11th and 19th Panzer Divisions, the Great Germany division and two Tiger battalions, who tried to break through to Bogodukhov, launched a counterattack. To repel it north and northeast of Akhtyrka, the 4th Guards and 47th Armies from the Headquarters reserve were introduced. During the counterattacks, the Germans managed to destroy or knock out about 300 tanks and take 1,800 prisoners.

On August 12, Soviet troops broke through to the east and southeast of Kharkov. The Germans failed to prevent the fall of Kharkov with counterattacks near Bogodukhov and Akhtyrka. They only managed to slow down the advance of the Soviet troops and enable the Kharkov garrison to withdraw. Manstein led the army group "Kempf" out of the city, which was threatened with encirclement. On August 23, Kharkov was taken by the troops of the Steppe Front with the assistance of the troops of the Voronezh and South-Western fronts, avoiding encirclement and retreating to the west. Soviet troops liquidated the enemy's Kharkov bridgehead, but they failed to encircle the main forces of Army Group South here. As in the case of the Oryol bridgehead, it turned out not to be surrounded, but to push the enemy out. According to official data, the Soviet troops during the Belgorod-Kharkov operation lost about 256 thousand people, including about 72 thousand people irrevocably.

Since official data on irretrievable losses are underestimated by 2-3 times, the total losses probably ranged from 328 thousand to 400 thousand, including from 144 thousand to 216 thousand - irretrievably.

It should be emphasized that in August 1943 the Red Army suffered the greatest losses in the entire war in killed and wounded.

At a meeting with Hitler on August 27, 1943, Manstein stated that since the beginning of the Citadel, Army Group South had lost 133 thousand people. Since in the period from July 4 to July 20, Army Group South lost 34,236 people, including 6902 killed and missing, the losses during the battle for Kharkov and the battle in the Donbass that ran parallel to it amounted to about 99 thousand people. In the battle on the Mius River from July 17 to August 2, German losses amounted to 21,369 people, including 5,543 killed and missing. In addition, the Germans also suffered significant losses during the Donbas offensive operation of the Southern and Southwestern fronts, which began on August 13 and ended on September 22. Assuming that in the period from August 13 to 27, the Germans lost about the same here as in the battle on the Miusky Front, it can be assumed that in the battle for Kharkov, German losses amounted to about 57 thousand people, including about 15 thousand dead and missing. In total, German losses on the Eastern Front amounted to 68.8 thousand killed, 34.8 thousand missing and about 434 thousand wounded and sick. Soviet losses during this period, only killed, could reach 1,575 thousand dead and died from wounds and diseases. During the repulse of the Soviet offensive on Orel and

Kharkov, the irretrievable losses of the Luftwaffe were probably about 440 vehicles, taking into account that 80% of the entire German aviation of the Eastern Front was concentrated on the Citadel front. Soviet irretrievable losses amounted to about 2300 aircraft.

The main reasons for the ratio of losses in aircraft, which was so disappointing for the Soviet side, were the lack of combat training among the pilots, the lack of fuel, and the qualitative advantage of German aircraft. Until the summer of 1943, Soviet fighters patrolled over the battlefield not at maximum, but at the most economical speed. In addition, until the end of the war, Soviet fighters mainly carried out patrols over the battlefield in order to maintain the morale of the Soviet infantry, while German fighters used a much more effective "free hunting" tactic, which, along with flying to

intercept on call radio guidance stations, achieve impressive results. The transition to "free hunting" over enemy territory was hampered by poor flight training and the poor performance of guidance services.

## The myth of the battle for the Dnieper

The battle for the Dnieper is one of the most mythologized battles of the Great Patriotic War. Even during the war, the crossing of the Dnieper and the liberation of Kyiv were considered one of the main events that predetermined its outcome. It is no coincidence that 2,438 soldiers were awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for crossing the Dnieper, which is one fifth of all those awarded this high title in 1941-1945. This was the most massive award of Gold Stars in the entire war. Therefore, the ironic expression "Dnieper hero" was established in the troops.

In fact, as on the Kursk Bulge, on the Dnieper the Red Army would have been able to encircle and destroy significant Wehrmacht groupings only if it had been possible to reach the Dnieper crossings and cut off the enemy before the main forces of the German army groups South and Center On the left coast. However, the Germans managed to cross the first. Hitler hoped to cling to the

"Dneprovsky Val" in order to stop the advance of the Red Army there and stabilize the Eastern Front. However, the Germans did not manage to create any serious fortifications on the western, high bank of the Dnieper. The troops of the Army Groups "Center" and "South" retreated to the Dnieper were not enough to occupy the entire line of the Dnieper. The Soviet troops of the Southern, Southwestern, Steppe, Voronezh and Central Fronts, renamed on October 20, respectively, into the 4th, 3rd, 2nd, 1st Ukrainian and 1st Belorussian Fronts, numbered about 2.65 million people, and the German troops - no more 700 thousand people. The Soviet troops had 2,400 tanks and 2,850 aircraft. The Germans, according to Soviet estimates, had 2,100 tanks and assault guns and 2,000 aircraft. The order to create the "Eastern Wall" along the Dnieper was given only on August 11, 1943, and the Soviet troops began to advance towards the Dnieper on August 24. The main groupings of

German troops were concentrated at the strategically important industrial centers near Kremenchug, Nikopol and Zaporozhye. Hitler demanded to keep the Donbass, as well as

Nikopol manganese and metallurgical plants in Kremenchug and Zaporozhye, so that these resources do not increase the military-economic potential

of the Russians. During the retreat beyond the Dnieper, the tactics of "scorched earth" were carried out. The German General Friedrich Wilhelm von Mellenthin described it as follows: "The idea of destroying all food supplies and creating a "desert zone" between us and the advancing Russian troops did not arouse our enthusiasm. But the fate of Army Group South was at stake, and if we had not taken such measures, many thousands of soldiers would never have been able to reach the Dnieper and organize a solid defense beyond this water frontier.

On September 15, it became clear that it would not be possible to hold the Donbass, and Hitler allowed the withdrawal to the Dnieper to begin. On September 23, troops of the 5th Guards Army liberated Poltava. By the end of September 1943, Soviet troops finally reached the lower reach

The Soviet command, at the suggestion of Marshal Zhukov, tried to land parachute assault forces on the right bank of the Dnieper in order to capture the bridgeheads before the main German forces had time to cross the Dnieper, and thereby prevent the enemy from organizing defense along the Dnieper. On the night of September 24, the Dnieper airborne assault was carried out operation by forces of two airborne brigades, which ended in complete failure. Due to the poor training of the pilots and their loss of orientation on the ground, the first wave of landing troops was dropped partly on Soviet positions, and partly directly into the Dnieper. 5 thousand paratroopers of the 2nd wave were scattered over an area of several tens of square kilometers. Most of them were destroyed by the Germans. The remaining small scattered groups without heavy weapons were forced to hide from the enemy in the forests or go out to the Dnieper in the hope that they would be transported to the left bank. After this failure, the Red Army did not conduct more landing operations in the fight against Germany. Stalin scolded Zhukov and Vatutin in a special order: "The release of a mass landing at night testifies to the illiteracy of the organizers of this case, because, as experience shows, the release of a mass night landing even on their own territory is fraught with great difficulties ..." From

landing in the daytime, Zhukov refused out of fear that the Soviet Air Force would not be able to gain air supremacy in the landing area.

Having failed with the airborne assault, the Headquarters decided to force the Dnieper on the move, using all available means and without conducting preliminary preparations and reconnaissance. This left no time for the Germans to build fortifications. However, under such conditions it was impossible to conduct reconnaissance of enemy positions and organize effective artillery preparation. Therefore, the units that were the first to cross the Dnieper suffered heavy losses.

On September 6, the troops of the 60th Army of the Central Front captured Konotop, on September 9 - Bakhmach, and on the 15th - Nizhyn. A tempting prospect opened up to capture Kiev, over which the troops of the Central Front hung from the north. The 13th Army of General Nikolai Pukhov, which reached the Desna, received an order to force the Dnieper on the move and seize a bridgehead there in the Chernobyl region, the mouth of the Teterev River. The 65th Army of General Pavel Batov was to capture Novgorod Seversky. The Voronezh Front lagged behind the Central Front by 100–120 km. However, Stalin preferred that Kyiv take the

Voronezh Front. The first bridgehead on the right bank of the Dnieper was captured on September 22, 1943 in the area of the confluence of the Dnieper and Pripjat by the troops of the 13th Army of the Central Front. On September 24–25, two bridgeheads appeared near Dneprodzerzhinsk, and on September 28, another one near Kremenchug. By the end of the month, there were already 23 bridgeheads across the Dnieper in the hands of the Soviet troops. They were subjected to powerful air bombardment, artillery fire and tank attacks. As a result, the first divisions that crossed the Dnieper by the beginning of October lost 70-75% of their personnel. However, the Germans did not have enough infantry and tanks to carry out effective

counterattacks against the Soviet bridgeheads. The final attack on Kyiv was carried out from the Lyutezh bridgehead. Prior to this, during the October offensive from the Bukrinsky bridgehead, carried out at the initiative of Zhukov, the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front suffered very heavy losses, but did not achieve success. At the end of October, in the area north of Krivoy Rog, Manstein launched a counterattack with the forces of the 1st Panzer and 8th Armies in order to prevent the possible encirclement of

5 thousand prisoners were captured, 350 tanks were destroyed, according to Manstein, up to 10 thousand Red Army soldiers were killed. However, it was not possible to throw Soviet troops into the Dnieper. But this counterattack weakened the German grouping in the Kyiv region, which the Soviet command did not fail to take

advantage of. On November 6, Kyiv was liberated by the 38th Army, which was part of the Voronezh Front. Before the attack on Kyiv, its commander, General Nikolai Chibisov, a Russian by nationality, was replaced by a Ukrainian, General Kirill Moskalenko.

There was pure politics here. For the propaganda mythology that was born right on the battlefields, Stalin needed the Ukrainians to command the troops that were supposed to liberate the capital of Ukraine. The Voronezh (later the 1st Ukrainian) Front was commanded by the purebred Ukrainian Nikolai Fedorovich Vatutin, and the head of the Ukrainian Communists, Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev, was a member of the Military Council.

During the subsequent offensive of Vatutin's troops, the German 25th Panzer Division, which had been thrown into battle for the first time, suffered heavy losses. Unfired German soldiers fled in panic from the battlefield, and the division lost almost all of its wheeled

vehicles. On November 15, Manstein launched a counterattack, hoping to recapture Kyiv. He managed to recapture Zhitomir and Korosten, capture 5,000 Red Army soldiers, and destroy, according to the headquarters of the German 4th Panzer Army, 600 Soviet tanks. However, the Germans did not have the strength to re-capture the capital of Ukraine. Soon the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front launched a counteroffensive, on December 31 they finally liberated Zhytomyr, and on January 3, 1944 they reached the old Soviet-Polish border. Due to the lack of forces, the Dnieper never became a serious defensive line for the Germans.

## The myth of the Korsun-Shevchenko battle

The main myth of the Korsun-Shevchenko operation, created by Soviet commanders and historiography, is that almost the entire encircled German group was destroyed and only a few soldiers and officers managed to break out of the encirclement. The Germans usually refer to this battle as Cherkasy.

"boiler".

In November and December 1943, German troops defended themselves in the bend of the Dnieper near Cherkasy in order to ensure the possibility of a counterattack on Zhitomir and Kyiv. Their flanks were stretched out and poorly defended, making it likely that a Soviet offensive would be launched to cut off the Cherkassy salient. On December 27, 1943, Manstein proposed to retreat from this ledge and from the Nikopol area near the bend of the Dnieper. Hitler refused, because after such a withdrawal, Soviet troops could attack the already cut off Crimea, and Nikopol manganese was considered vital to the German war economy. But some precautions were still taken. In particular, two rear positions were prepared north of the Ros River and east of Boguslav. On January 24, 1944, the right flank of the Cherkasy salient was attacked by the 2nd Ukrainian Front of General Ivan Konev, and the left flank by the 1st Ukrainian Front of General Nikolai Vatutin.

By the beginning of the attack on the Korsun-Shevchenkovsky ledge on January 24, 1944, the 1st Ukrainian Front had 335 tanks and self-propelled guns, and the 2nd Ukrainian Front had 335 armored vehicles. On January 27, the SS Viking division, together with three infantry divisions from the Pastorsky area, launched a counterattack on the grouping of the 2nd Ukrainian Front advancing on Shpola. Fights began with units of the 4th Guards Army. During the three-day battles, separate detachments of German tanks with infantry managed to reach the communications of the advancing Soviet troops several times, but by January 29 they were driven back. According to Manstein, during this counterattack, large Soviet forces were surrounded and defeated.



1st Panzer Army, which lost 8 thousand killed, 5.5 thousand prisoners, 700 tanks and 700 guns.

However, these losses still did not stop the offensive of the Soviet troops. On January 28, the 5th Mechanized Corps of the 1st Ukrainian Front and the 20th Tank Corps of the 2nd Ukrainian Front met in the Zvenigorodka area, closing the encirclement. Surrounded by the 11th and 52nd Army Corps, they had about 200 tanks and assault guns in the Viking division and three assault gun battalions.

They had to be supplied by air. The breakthrough could only be made to the south. Five infantry divisions, one SS Viking Panzer Division, the SS Wallonia motorized brigade, the RGK light artillery division and the assault guns brigade, which consisted of two divisions, were in the ring. The surrounded were led by the commander of the 11th Corps, General Wilhelm Stemmerman. Soviet troops constantly attacked Korsun and Shanderovka in order to dismember the "cauldron" in two. The liquidation of the encircled was hampered by roads softened from mud and snowstorms. Although the entire territory of the "cauldron", starting from February 8, was shot through by Soviet artillery, the supply of shells for guns was difficult.

The 1st Panzer Army of General Hans Hube began to create a deblocking group. Hube sent a radiogram to the "cauldron", promising to rescue those surrounded. The basis of the grouping was the 3rd tank corps of General Herman Breit. This corps formed the basis of the deblocking group. On February 9, an

ultimatum was presented to the encircled, signed by Zhukov, Vatutin and Konev. They were promised life, safety, food, medical care and return to Germany after the war. Stemmermann rejected the ultimatum and continued to prepare for a breakthrough. 2000 wounded Germans were left at the mercy of the Soviet soldiers. Initially, the breakthrough was scheduled for 10 February, but due to mudslides and heavy Soviet attacks, which made it difficult to regroup, it was postponed until 16

February. From February 3 to February 16, German transport aviation made almost 900 sorties into the "cauldron", delivering ammunition, fuel and food and evacuating the wounded. On February 14, after the capture of Korsun-Shevchenkivskyi, the last

landing site, after which the cargo had to be dropped from aircraft.

Attempts by the 8th German Army to break through to the encircled divisions through the battle formations of the 2nd Ukrainian Front of Konev ended in vain. The deblocking grouping of the 1st Panzer Army, consisting of the Leibstandarte and three Wehrmacht tank divisions, operated more successfully against Vatutin's 1st Ukrainian Front. She managed to wedge herself into the positions of the 47th Rifle Corps. After that, Vatutin brought into battle the 2nd tank army of General Semyon Bogdanov, which had just arrived from the Stavka reserve and numbered 326 tanks and self-propelled guns. This army attacked the enemy on the morning of February 6 in cooperation with units of the 40th and 6th tank armies. As a result of the oncoming tank battle, the advance of the German 3rd Panzer Corps was stopped, but it held the wedging. In the zone of the 2nd Ukrainian Front on the outer front of the encirclement, the enemy

managed to push back parts of the 49th Rifle Corps and occupy the stations of Zvenigorodka, Yerki and Skalevatka. Only the brigades of the 20th Panzer Corps were able to stop the further advance of the Germans. In the zone of the 1st Ukrainian Front, the German strike force, advancing from the Rizino region, broke through the defenses of the 47th Rifle Corps and captured Lisyanka. On the night of February 12, the encircled began a breakthrough from the Steblevo area on a narrow front of 4.5 km. In the forefront was the Viking motorized infantry battalion, followed by the Deutschland motorized regiment. They succeeded in pushing back units of the 27th Army and reaching the Shanderovka area. The distance to the divisions of the 3rd Panzer Corps was reduced to 10-12 km. Stalin was dissatisfied with the way the process of liquidating the encircled German corps was proceeding.

On February 12, despite Zhukov's objections, he instructed Konev to liquidate the Korsun-Shevchenko group, and ordered Vatutin to focus on holding the outer front of the ring. Georgy Konstantinovich was entrusted with coordinating the actions of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian fronts to prevent the enemy from breaking through the encirclement. Zhukov understood that in this way the laurels of victory were leaving his protégé Vatutin for Konev, but he could not do anything. In Stalin's order of February 18, following the results of the Korsun-Shevchenko operation, only the 2nd Ukrainian

front. The 1st Ukrainian Front did not appear in the order. Stalin was offended by Vatutin for allowing the connection of the main forces surrounded with the 1st Tank Army coming to their rescue. Therefore, he awarded the title of marshal for the Korsun-Shevchenko operation only to Konev. On the

night of February 17, thanks to surprise, without artillery preparation, the German strike units as part of the Viking division, the Wallonia brigade and the B corps group managed to break through the inner front of the encirclement and reach the vicinity of Lisyanka. The rearguard units were kept at the opposite end of the "cauldron", which ensured success at the beginning of the breakthrough. Soviet tank corps were scattered around the entire perimeter of the "boiler". Therefore, there were only 20 tanks in the direction of the breakthrough.

Under heavy enemy fire and attacks by Soviet tanks, most of the German troops escaping from the "cauldron" deviated from the original direction of attack towards the Gniloy Tikich River. The exhausted encirclement had to break the resistance of the Soviet military outposts along the river and swim and wade across it, leaving their weapons behind. They connected with units of the 3rd Panzer Corps on the night of February 18th. 35,000 people,

including 2,000 wounded, came out of the "cauldron", led by the commander of the 52nd Army Corps, General Theobald Helmut Lieb. About 5 thousand people died or were captured during the breakthrough. General Stemmermann died during the breakthrough. It has never been established whether he was the victim of a severe shell shock from a Soviet mine explosion or whether his heart simply stopped. But the troops that broke through lost almost all heavy weapons and for a long time turned out to be incapable of combat. According to Manstein, in total, the two army corps that were surrounded numbered 54 thousand people, but part of the rear services was outside the ring. Soviet troops captured 11 thousand prisoners. The Germans during the counterattacks on the Soviet troops in the area of the Korsun-Shevchenkovsky "cauldron" captured 7 thousand prisoners.

According to our estimates, the losses of Soviet troops in the Korsun Shevchenko operation amounted to about 81.2 thousand killed and missing and about 120.6 thousand wounded. German losses during the battle near Cherkassy amounted to about 45 thousand people, in

including irrevocable - 27 thousand people. The reports of the Sovinformburo spoke about 80 thousand surrounded, of which 55 thousand were allegedly killed, and 18 thousand were taken prisoner in order to preserve the myth of the destruction of the encircled group. The fact that these data do not correspond to reality was recognized in October 1957, when Marshal Zhukov was criticized for "Bonapartism" at the Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

## The myth of the battle near Kamenetz-Podolsk

The myth of the Kamenetz-Podolsk encirclement was created in Soviet historiography and memoirs. It was claimed that the German 1st Panzer Army, encircled in March 1944 in the Kamianets-Podilskyi region, was largely annihilated. Only a few dozen tanks with generals and infantry troops were able to break out of the ring. The 1st Panzer Army of

General Hube, which had released the Korsun Shevchenkovsky pocket, soon found itself surrounded in the Skala-Podolskaya area. It was surrounded by a large semicircle north of the Dniester by the troops of the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts of Marshals Zhukov and Konev. By March 25, the encirclement was complete. Hube's soldiers were supposed to have enough ammunition and food for two weeks, but fuel supplies were very small. Fuel deliveries by air did not cover the needs. Therefore, almost all vehicles had to be abandoned, leaving only tanks, armored personnel carriers, assault and self-propelled guns and armored personnel carriers. The army shortened the front line and concentrated north of Kamenets Podolsky.

There was a question about a breakthrough. Was it better to strike directly to the west, along the Dniester, or to the south, through the Khotyn bridgehead. In the latter case, the breakthrough would cause less difficulties, there would be a weak enemy in front of the breaking through units, and such a direction of the breakthrough would probably allow all German forces to be withdrawn to Romania. But then the tank army would be in a secondary strategic direction, and it would be very difficult to transfer it to protect the Reich due to the conditions of the terrain. To the west of the "cauldron" several rivers served as natural obstacles to the breakthrough. In addition, it was here that the Germans could expect to meet with the main forces of the Soviet group.

But Manstein, contrary to the opinion of Hube, ordered to break through to the west in the direction that caused the greatest difficulties, but also provided the greatest surprise. The field marshal explained his plan this way: "... It was necessary that the 1st Panzer Army, moving west, united with the 4th Panzer Army. How

otherwise it was possible to prevent the enemy's breakthrough into Galicia north of the Carpathians? An attempt by the army to slip south across the Dniester would, at best, have ended in being pushed back into the Carpathians, but this is also doubtful. Of course, the way south across the Dniester was at first less risky. However, a more detailed analysis showed that he led the army to destruction. She did not have crossing facilities and bridges to overcome the Dniester on a wide front. If she tried to cross the river on the few permanent bridges, she would lose the main part of her heavy equipment due to the actions of enemy aircraft. But more importantly, the enemy was advancing from the east already south of the Dniester. Sooner or later, the army would find itself between these advancing enemy forces and those of his two tank armies that had just cut its communications and were going to force the Dniester in the rear of the army in a southerly direction ... SS corps Paul Hausser, consisting of two

armored, infantry and mountain rifle divisions. Hitler agreed to this plan, but sent Manstein himself to the reserve on 1 April.

On March 27, the breakthrough began. Soviet troops were fairly easily pushed back from Zbruch, where three intact bridges were captured. Meanwhile, from the bridgeheads on Zbruch, the Soviet 1st Panzer Army continued its offensive towards Seret. Zhukov at that moment was not yet sure that Hube would not break through to the south. Therefore, Soviet aviation continued to bombard positions in the north and east of the "cauldron", already abandoned by the German rearguards. Only when on March 28 the southern group of the German 1st Panzer Army cut the road to Chertkov, and on March 29 the advanced units of the northern group reached the Seret River, did the Soviet 4th Panzer Army begin to be transferred from positions south of the Dniester to prevent a breakthrough of the surrounded to the west. On March 31, she launched a counterattack from the Gorodenka area. The southern grouping of the German 1st Panzer Army went on the defensive and, in turn, was able to cut off the communications of the Soviet tankers, which limited their ability to counteract the breakthrough. The northern group was not attacked by the Soviet 1st Panzer Army. On April 5, the encircled reached the

united in the Buchach area with the 10th SS Panzer Division Frundsberg, which delivered a deblocking blow. Marshal Zhukov admitted in his memoirs: "Now, analyzing this whole operation, I think that the 1st Panzer Army should have been turned from the Chertkov-Tolstoy region to the east to strike at the encircled grouping. But at that time we had solid data, obtained from various sources, about the decision of the encircled enemy to break through to the south across the Dniester in the area of Zalizchikov. Such a decision seemed quite possible and logical. In this case, the enemy, having crossed the Dniester, could take the southern bank of the river and organize defenses there ... We believed that under these conditions it was necessary to cover the enemy with the 1st Panzer Army deeper, transferring its main forces across the Dniester, and capture the Zalizchyky-Chernivtsi region "Kolomiya... But when the German command of the Army Group South became aware of the interception of the retreat routes to the south by the Soviet troops, it ordered the encircled troops to break through not to the south, but to the west, through Buchach and Podgaitsy."

In parallel with the release of the 1st Panzer Army, the 9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen" unsuccessfully tried to release the 5,000th garrison surrounded in Ternopil. On April 17, Ternopil was occupied by the 60th Army of the 1st Ukrainian Front, which captured 2.5 thousand people.

prisoners.

On April 10, Soviet troops captured Odessa, and Field Marshal von Kleist's Army Group A retreated across the Dniester. In the Proskurovo Chernivtsi operation, Zhukov suggested that the enemy would make what seemed the simplest decision: retreat to the Dniester. Meanwhile, if he had calculated all the possible consequences of this decision, as Manstein did, he would have to come to the conclusion that in any case it would be optimal to cover the main forces of tank formations in the western direction, and not in the southern direction.

In the Proskurov-Chernivtsi operation, Soviet irretrievable losses amounted to about 125.3 thousand people, and sanitary - about 182.6 thousand people. German irretrievable losses can be estimated at 42 thousand people. However, the main forces of the 1st Panzer Army with the bulk of the armored vehicles managed to get out of the encirclement.

## The myth of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA)

The main myth of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), created by Soviet propaganda and preserved in Russian and Ukrainian historiography, is the assertion that the UPA was created at the behest of the German occupiers and that its fighters and commanders were Nazi accomplices who actively participated, in particular, in the "final solution of the Jewish question" in the occupied territories.

By the beginning of World War II, the organization of Ukrainian nationalists had a significant influence on the Ukrainian lands of Poland and in Transcarpathian Ukraine, which was part of Hungary. It was split into two factions - Stepan Bandera and Andrei Melnik. The Bandera faction actively used terrorist methods in the fight against the Polish state, organizing, in particular, the assassination of the Minister of the Interior Bronislaw Peratsky. Miller's faction was not engaged in terror. She emphasized the propaganda of Ukrainian independence and the uprising of Ukrainians in the event of a war between Germany and Poland and the USSR. The Bandera faction also led preparations for the uprising and promoted the idea of a Ukrainian

independence.

On February 10, 1940, Bandera's supporters created the OUN Revolutionary Wire in Krakow. In April 1941, at a congress of his supporters, Bandera was proclaimed head of the OUN. The Bandera faction was preparing an anti-Soviet armed uprising in Western Ukraine, while the Miller faction expected to resume active work in Ukraine with the arrival of German troops there. Shortly before the start of the Soviet-German war, Bandera met with the head of the Abwehr, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, who supported Bandera's idea of creating an independent and allied Germany of Ukraine. However, the voice of Canaris in this matter did not matter much, since Hitler, who rejected the independence of Ukraine, decided everything.



After the German attack on the USSR, Bandera authorized the creation of a Ukrainian government in Lvov on June 30, headed by Yaroslav Stetsko. On July 5, 1941, after the dispersal of this government by the Germans, Bandera was arrested in Krakow and subsequently placed in the Sachsenhausen political bloc.

In February 1941, with the help of the Abwehr, two Ukrainian battalions "Nachtigal" (from Ukrainians in Poland) and "Roland" (mainly from Ukrainians from other countries) were formed. There were 330 people in Nachtigall and 270 people in Roland. German officers commanded battalions and companies. On the Ukrainian side, Roman Shukhevych, a longtime ally of Bandera, was considered the commander of the Nachtigall, and Evgen Pobiguschiy, a former major in the Polish army, who joined the OUN-B only in 1940, after being released from German captivity, was considered the commander of the Roland.

On the night of June 30, together with the advanced battalion of the German Brandenburg regiment, Nachtigal entered Lvov without a fight. In early July, the Nachtigal was removed from the city so that it would not interfere with the dispersal of the Stetsko government. Contrary to the allegations spread by Soviet propaganda, Shukhevych's people had nothing to do with the extermination of the Jews and the Polish intelligentsia of Lvov, which began later. This was established during an investigation at a hearing in the US Congress in 1954. At the same time, it was proved that the leadership of the OUN (Bandera) and the UPA was in no way involved in the "final solution of the Jewish question." And that it stopped political cooperation with the Germans shortly after the dissolution of the government in Lvov.

The situation was different with the Ukrainian military and police formations. On August 13, 1941, the Nachtigal, which had previously fought heavy battles with Soviet troops in the region of Brailov and Vinnitsa, was withdrawn from the front. At the same time, the Roland was also recalled from the front, which was in the Odessa region and did not have time to join the battle. The fighters of both Nachtigall and Roland were outraged to learn that the Germans had dispersed the Ukrainian government, that Galicia was annexed to the Polish General Government, and the rest of Ukraine became the Reich Commissariat. But they decided that it was still too early to break with the Germans, since this step would ease the position of the Bolsheviks.

From the number of volunteers from two battalions, the 201st police battalion was formed, in March 1942 sent to fight partisans in Belarus. The Germans began repressions against Ukrainian nationalists. In Babi Yar, in particular, the former burgomaster of Kyiv Bagazyi, the poetess Olena Teliga and other Ukrainian nationalists, supporters of both Melnyk and Bandera, were shot.

In April 1942, the Second Conference of the OUN-B (Revolutionary Wire) confirmed the fight against the Bolsheviks as a priority. It was decided not to start fighting the Germans, despite the arrests and executions by the German police of a number of OUN activists. At that moment, the victory of Germany in the war still seemed possible, and Bandera and his associates, considering Hitler as a lesser evil for Ukraine than Stalin, hoped to agree with the winners on the creation of the Ukrainian state. The slogan was put forward: "Let the imperialists of the two countries bleed themselves in a war against each other." October 14, 1942 became the official founding day of the UPA. As if on this

day, the soldiers of the 201st police battalion refused to sign a new contract to continue serving in the German armed forces and to take an oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler. They were arrested, but the vast majority managed to escape and make their way to Western Ukraine. In fact, the date of October 14 falls on the popular holiday of the Intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos in Ukraine. It is more plausible that the revocation of the oath took place in November. The Ukrainian officers of the disbanded 201st battalion were transported to Lvov, where they were arrested at the end of December. But many, led by Shukhevych, managed to escape and went to

underground.

The decision to start an armed struggle against the Germans was made at the III Conference of the OUN (b) in February 1943. By then it was clear that Germany would be defeated. By that time, the Ukrainian population was convinced that the Germans were little better than the Bolsheviks.

Dissatisfaction was caused by terror, the mass seizure of products for the needs of the Reich and the Wehrmacht, as well as the deportation of young people for forced labor in Germany. Those who evaded the hijacking formed the backbone of the UPA detachments, along with deserters from the local Ukrainian police and police battalions. This is desertion

the end of winter - the beginning of spring 1943 took on a mass character in the Right-Bank

Ukraine. The UPA began hostilities in Volhynia against the Poles. UPA fighters fought both against the Polish Home Army and against the Polish policemen who replaced the Ukrainians in the German auxiliary police. Since there were more than 70% of the population in Volhynia, and no more than 15% of the Poles, the UPA prevailed in the Ukrainian-Polish war in Volyn in 1943–1944, which also spread to Eastern Galicia. Between 50,000 and 100,000 Poles were killed, the overwhelming majority being civilians, and at least 20,000 Ukrainians, mostly also civilians. It is worth noting that there were many Jews among the UPA, especially doctors. The tolerant attitude towards local Jews was explained by the fact that anti-Semitism was not widespread among the Ukrainians of Galicia and the Jews were more likely to be seen as allies against the Poles. The situation was different in Volhynia, which until 1917 was part of the Russian Empire, where anti-Semitism was state policy. There, among Ukrainians, anti-Semitism had deeper roots. In 1942, the OUN-B refused to participate in the deportation and extermination of Jews carried out by the Nazis, motivating this in a rather peculiar way: "Despite the negative attitude towards the Jews as an instrument of Moscow-Bolshevik imperialism, we consider it inappropriate at the present moment of the international situation to take part in an anti-Jewish action, so as not to become a blind weapon in the hands of others and not to divert the attention of the masses from the main enemies. The main enemies were understood to be the Nazis and Soviet communists. Individual UPA fighters during their service with the Germans or later, already in the ranks of the rebels, could participate in the murders of Jews, but exactly the same excesses were in the Home Army and the Soviet partisans, which, however, was not a consequence of the policy of the Ukrainian, Polish or Soviet command. Ukrainian rebels operated on the territory of Polish

Ukraine, as well as Northern Bukovina and Transcarpathia, which was part of Hungary. They also fought against the Soviet partisans, who were few in these areas. With large partisan formations that came from Eastern Ukraine, the UPA fighters

tried to avoid collisions. In November 1943, Roman Shukhevych became commander-in-chief of the

UPA. The Germans estimated the number of UPA at 80-100 thousand fighters. The surviving rebel leaders, who ended up in exile, claimed that from 200 to 400 thousand people fought simultaneously in the ranks of the UPA. Probably, the total number of fighters who fought in the ranks of the UPA at different times ranged from 100 to 200 thousand people. Unlike the Soviet partisans, they did not receive any supplies from behind the front lines. Therefore, Bandera's supporters could only attack small groups and garrisons of German troops. The Abwehr, on the other hand, estimated the number of Ukrainian partisans mainly by their combat activity. Beginning in the autumn of 1944, after the Germans left Ukraine, the leadership of the Ukrainian nationalists focused on England and the United States and relied on the post-war armed conflict between the USSR and Western countries. In 1948, after the start of the Cold War, the leadership of the OUN established contact with the intelligence services of England and the United States. The assistance of the latter was expressed in the fact that a number of activists of the Bandera faction of the OUN and UPA fighters who had broken through to the West, equipped with radio stations, were abandoned by American aircraft to Western Ukraine. They were supposed to supply information about the Soviet Army and the socio-political situation.

The UPA lacked weapons and hoped to get them with the help of the Germans. When in 1943 the Germans began to form the 14th Infantry (Grenadier) Division of the SS "Galicia", instead of the required 15 thousand, 80 thousand volunteers appeared in the division. The German command suspected something was wrong and selected only 13 thousand volunteers. Nevertheless, the 14th SS Infantry Division "Galicia" ("Galicia") was formed. The division "Galicia" took its first battle with the Red Army in July 1944 near Brody, where it was surrounded. After that, several thousand soldiers and officers deserted and joined the UPA units, and those who remained, together with the German troops, broke through from the encirclement.

UPA fighters in May 1943 killed the chief of staff of the assault detachments (SA), SA Obergruppenführer Viktor Lutze. Also, the commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front, General Nikolai Vatutin (in 1944) and deputy

Minister of Defense of Poland, General Karol Swierczewski, one of the organizers of the Vistula operation to deport the Ukrainian population of Poland (in March 1947). According to

the NKVD of the Ukrainian SSR, from February to December 31, 1944, 6495 operations were carried out against the UPA, in which 57,405 "bandits" were destroyed, 50,387 were captured and detained, and 15,990 turned themselves in. However, for almost 108,000 killed and captured insurgents, less than 32,000 small arms were captured. Data on the number of killed and captured "bandits" were exaggerated many times over.

In total, from the actions of the OUN-UPA in the period from 1944 to 1956, according to official figures, 3199 Soviet military personnel died, not counting the employees of the NKVD, the NKGB and the MGB and the fighters of the destruction battalions. According to other estimates, up to 25 thousand soldiers of the Red Army, NKVD troops, border troops, policemen and fighters of destruction battalions died in battles with the UPA. More than 30 thousand party and Soviet activists, representatives of the nomenklatura and civilians were also killed. It should also be noted that the NKVD and the NKGB, and later the MGB, actively used false partisan detachments in the fight against the UPA. These detachments, dressed in UPA uniforms, either lured the rebels into ambushes and eliminated them, or attacked the civilian population, robbing and killing in order to turn the peasants

against Bandera. Since the end of 1944, the UPA detachments, due to the lack of heavy weapons and a sufficient amount of ammunition, tried to avoid clashes with large detachments of the Red Army and the NKVD troops. Nevertheless, back in the first half of 1945, UPA fighters attacked regional centers 11

times. On September 3, 1949, UPA Commander-in-Chief Roman Shukhevych (General Taras Chuprynka) ordered the disbandment of the Insurgent Army. He was killed in a battle with the Chekists on March 5, 1950.

By that time, the UPA had almost run out of ammunition, and the social base of the movement was largely undermined by the deportation in 1944-1948 of 78,000 residents of Western Ukraine. The deportations continued later. Nevertheless, separate UPA detachments operated until September 1953, and the last scattered detachments ceased resistance in 1956.

## The myth of the liberation of Crimea

The main myth associated with the liberation of the Crimea by the Red Army in 1943-1944 is that the main forces of the German-Romanian 17th Army were sunk during the subsequent evacuation by sea. On October 19, the

command of the 17th German Army ordered the evacuation of the Crimea through the Isthmus of Perekop, which, however, was canceled by Hitler on the same day. By the beginning of November, the troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front reached the lower reaches of the Dnieper and isolated the Crimea from land. The first attacks of the Soviet troops at Perekop and Chongar were repulsed, but small bridgeheads were created

on the coast of Sivash. On October 31, the troops of the North Caucasian Front, transformed on November 20 into the Separate Primorsky Army of General Ivan Petrov, began the Kerch-Eltigen landing operation. On the Kerch Peninsula, the Yenikal battery and other German and Romanian units were taken by surprise. The Black Sea Fleet successfully landed the marines and units of the 18th Army near the village of Eltigen. But the Azov flotilla, because of the storm, was unable to land three divisions of the 56th Army in the Kerch region. This landing was landed only on the night of November 3 and by November 12 advanced to the outskirts of Kerch, but could not capture the city. 75 thousand people, 769 guns and mortars, 128 tanks were transferred to the bridgehead. In Eltigen, only 9.5 thousand people fought on the Soviet side. The Germans managed to block the Eltigen landing from the sea with the help of high-speed landing barges (HDB), which were superior in combat qualities to Soviet torpedo and patrol boats. The command of the Black Sea Fleet was afraid to use large warships because of the mine and aviation danger. In addition, there were too few destroyers in the fleet after the leader "Kharkov" and the destroyers "Boyky" and "Savvy" were sunk by the Luftwaffe on October 6, 1943 during the shelling of the Crimean ports. During the Kerch-Eltigen landing operation, the Black Sea Fleet lost 96 ships. The Germans lost 8 BDBs, another 14 BDBs and 3 minesweepers

were damaged. The paratroopers in Eltigen had to be supplied mainly by air, and hunger began among them. Soviet aviation suffered heavy losses from the fire of German anti-aircraft artillery. According to German estimates, a total of 140 aircraft were shot down. The remnants of the landing force after fierce fighting broke through to the outskirts of Kerch, from where on December 11 the Azov flotilla evacuated 1440 people. 2827 paratroopers were captured and more than 5 thousand died. The Germans lost in these battles 1203 people killed and wounded, the

Romanians - 952 people. Hitler insisted on holding the Crimea, since Soviet aircraft from its airfields could bomb the Romanian oil fields. However, in early April, Soviet troops reached the Dniester, from where it was closer to Ploiesti than from the Crimea, which made it senseless to hold it. The evacuation, it would seem, was overdue, but for Hitler it still played a significant role that the 17th Army in the Crimea diverted significant Soviet forces and means, which, after the evacuation of the Crimea, could be used for an offensive in Ukraine. Soviet

troops operating in the Crimea numbered 470 thousand people, 5982 guns and mortars, 559 tanks and self-propelled guns, 1250 aircraft. They were opposed by the 17th German army of General Erwin Jeneke, which by April 8, numbered 128.5 thousand German and 66 thousand Romanian soldiers with more than three thousand guns and mortars, 215 tanks and assault guns and 102 aircraft. In addition, there were up to 10 Romanian and Croatian aircraft, of

which no more than 5 were operational. By the evening of April 11, the German defenses at Perekop were broken through by the troops of the 51st and 2nd Guards armies. On the night of April 11, the Separate Primorskaya Army also began an offensive, which on April 13 in the Karasubazar region connected with the advanced units of the 4th Ukrainian Front. On April 11, having received Hitler's permission, the German-Romanian troops began to retreat to Sevastopol. It turned out that the Kerch landing did not play any role, since

the German-Romanian troops had to retreat due to the breakthrough of the Perekop positions. On April 14, the detachment of the commandant of the "Sevastopol fortress" Colonel Beets, with the support of att

hours to retreat to the fortress of the 49th mountain rifle corps of General Rudolf Konrad. The main forces of the German troops arrived in Sevastopol on April 20, only 6 hours ahead of the Soviet troops. From April 16 to April 30, several unsuccessful assaults on the fortress city were undertaken. On April 20, Hitler gave the order to hold the "fortress of Sevastopol" and continue the evacuation of only the Romanian units. Despite the ban, Jeneke continued to evacuate the Germans as well. During the period from April 14 to April 20, 79,969 soldiers and 2.5 thousand tons of various cargoes were evacuated from Crimea to

Romania. On May 1, Jeneke, who at Hitler's Headquarters insisted on the speedy evacuation of Sevastopol, was replaced as commander of the 17th Army by General Karl Almendinger. Between April 20 and May 3, another 13,400 Germans and 29,000 Romanians

were taken out. By the evening of May 7, the troops of the 51st Army captured Sapun Mountain, which dominated Sevastopol. Further defense of the fortress by the Germans became impossible. On May 8, the Germans left the northern sector of the front, and in the evening Hitler allowed the evacuation to begin. The surviving aircraft from the field airfield at Cape Khersones flew to Romania. From that moment on, Soviet aviation had complete air supremacy. By the end of May 9, all of Sevastopol was liberated by Soviet troops.

The Germans withdrew to the last defensive line from Streletskaia Bay to the sea, covering Cape Khersones. On May 9, not far from it, Soviet aircraft sank two large transports, Totila and Teia, on which about 8 thousand people died, and about one thousand were saved. On May 11, the transports

Danubius, Helga and "Geyseric". More than 5 thousand soldiers died on the last two.

On the night of May 12, the last large convoy left the waters of Chersonese. On the night of May 13, another 83 people were evacuated by torpedo boats. During the period from April 12 to May 8, the German fleet transported 64,563 soldiers, 9,424 wounded, 11,358 civilians and 4,260 prisoners of war from Crimea to Constanta and Sulina. From 9 to 12 May, 25,697 soldiers and 6,011 wounded were evacuated.

In total, since the beginning of the evacuation on April 12, out of 230 thousand personnel of the 17th Army, the German Navy, the civil German and Romanian administrations and Soviet prisoners of war to the mainland



about 131 thousand people were taken out by the German and Romanian fleets. During the same time, another 21,457 soldiers were taken out by Luftwaffe aircraft, of which 16,387 were wounded. Of the 152.5 thousand people evacuated to Romania, 96.8 thousand German military personnel were evacuated, 40.2 thousand Romanian military personnel. Between May 8 and 13, 57,500 people died and went missing (31,700 Germans and 25,800 Romanians). Of this number, 21,000 soldiers and officers were captured at Cape Khersones on May 12–13. The total irretrievable losses of the German-Romanian troops in the Crimea during the Crimean offensive operation of the Soviet troops amounted to about 78.5 thousand soldiers and officers. Soviet troops during the Crimean offensive, according to official figures, lost 84.8 thousand people, including 17.8 thousand - irretrievably. Most likely, irretrievable losses

are underestimated by 2-3 times. 190 German and Romanian civil and military ships took part in the evacuation of the German-Romanian troops. Of this number, 12 German warships and vessels, a Romanian destroyer, 7 steamers, 7 tugboats, 11 sea and 10 river lighters were lost. The Soviet Black Sea Fleet lost one submarine during the liberation of the Crimea in April-May 1944.

It was shot down and destroyed on the ground, according to German estimates, 262 Soviet aircraft. Among those based in the Crimea, only 7 German aircraft were lost in battles, of which one was shot down by its own air defense. Another 76 damaged vehicles were blown up before being evacuated. Three German aircraft operating from the mainland were also lost. About 25 aircraft in the last days of the defense of Sevastopol

flew to the mainland. The expediency of carrying out the Crimean operation, which diverted almost half a million troops and a significant amount of military equipment for more than a month, is not obvious. Perhaps these forces could be more effectively used to build up the offensive in southern Ukraine and Moldova. Then, perhaps, the defeat of the German troops in Romania would have occurred much earlier. The fact that the Germans still managed to evacuate the bulk of the 17th Army to Romania is explained by the passivity of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet. The actions of Soviet aviation were negatively affected by the lower level of training of Soviet pilots compared to

German, and the fact that the Soviet command did not dare to base their aircraft in the Crimea, fearing Luftwaffe attacks on airfields. In addition, due to the poor performance of transport services, Soviet aircraft, of which there were more than 1,000, experienced a lack of fuel.

Hitler in 1944, like Stalin in 1942, was late in the evacuation of Sevastopol. If the evacuation had been fully carried out since April 20, and had not been slowed down by the order to hold Sevastopol, it would probably have been possible to safely deliver another 50-60 thousand people to Constanta. But in general, the German evacuation of Sevastopol was much more successful than the Soviet evacuation.

## The myth of the Normandy landings

The main myth of the Allied landing in Normandy, which was established in Soviet historiography, is the assertion that it did not have any decisive significance for the outcome of World War II, took place with the overwhelming superiority of the Anglo-American troops and its success was largely ensured by the active actions of the Red Army on the Soviet Union. German front.

The landing of Anglo-American troops in France, called Operation Overlord, began on June 6, 1944. Previously, landings were impossible due to the lack of a sufficient number of landing craft adapted to landing on an unequipped coast, and also due to the fact that the Allies did not have sufficient air supremacy. First, a night parachute landing using gliders was thrown out, followed by bombardment and shelling of German positions by the fleet from the sea, and early in the morning an amphibious landing began. The Germans were expecting a landing at the shortest distance in the Pas de Calais region and therefore did not have enough forces in Normandy. On the coast of Seneca Bay, only three German divisions were defending. In total, German troops in Normandy numbered about 380 thousand people. About one million more German soldiers were stationed in the rest of France. They were merged into the Western Front of Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, which included Army Group B of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel (on July 17, after being seriously wounded, Field Marshal Hans Kluge replaced him) and Army Group G of General Josef Blaskowitz. In total, they had 58 divisions. At the same time, Blaskowitz, who defended southern France and the coast of the Bay of Biscay, had only 11 divisions. The allied forces consisted of 39 divisions and three brigades, combined into the 1st Canadian, 2nd British and 1st and 3rd American armies. General Dwight Eisenhower was the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces. The Anglo-Canadian Army Group was commanded by British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, while the American Army Group was commanded by General Omar Bradley. They were supported by 12,000 combat aircraft, while the Luftwaffe had 2,000 combat vehicles before landing. But

during the first weeks of the fighting, Allied aircraft had to be based across the English Channel, and both then and in the following months, until the end of the war, supply remained the main problem for the Allied armies in the West. Interruptions in the supply of fuel and ammunition reduced the balance of the allies. In the first echelon of the landing, 156 thousand people landed and up to 10 thousand units of tanks and vehicles. By July 25, 1452 thousand people landed, and by August 21 - 2052 thousand. However, the numerical superiority of the Allies on the battlefield was minimal, since most of the landed were busy organizing supplies. The number of German troops by the end of July increased to 490 thousand people. The allies had about 600 thousand people in combat units.

Only by the end of July did the Allies manage to make a breakthrough near Avranches and break out into the operational space. A significant grouping of German troops ended up in the "cauldron" at Falaise, and only half of the encircled managed to break through. The Germans had up to 2300 tanks and assault guns in Normandy against 6 thousand tanks and self-propelled guns from the allies. The German "tigers" and "panthers" were superior in their fighting qualities to the British and American tanks, but this advantage was more than offset by the dominance of the allies in the air. German armored vehicles were destroyed by Anglo-American air strikes. On August 15, the 6th Allied Army Group landed at Dijon, but this no longer affected the outcome of the battle, as the defeated German troops retreated to the borders of Germany. On August 25, Paris was liberated. The battle of Normandy is over.

It should be noted that on the Western Front the density of German troops, weapons and equipment was two and a half times greater than on the Eastern Front, which complicated the task of the Allies. In addition, the Germans in the West had at their disposal the Atlantic Wall and the Siegfried Line, albeit not completed, but consisting of long-term fortifications, while in the East such fortifications were only in East Prussia. In addition, selected German troops immediately fought against the Allies that landed in Normandy: the SS Panzer Corps, the Zapad Panzer Group, which consisted of training tank units (later the 5th Panzer Army), the parachute army, etc. In just two months of fighting in Normandy, from June 6 to August 21, 1944, American, British and Canadian troops lost about

40 thousand killed, 19.2 thousand missing and 153.5 thousand wounded. The German army lost 210 thousand prisoners, up to 30 thousand killed and up to 100 thousand wounded. The Germans also lost almost all tanks (they had no more than 100 armored vehicles left) and more than 2 thousand aircraft. At the same time, until July 23, the Germans lost 113 thousand people, and the Allies - 122 thousand people killed, wounded and captured, including 49 thousand British and Canadians and 73 thousand Americans. Central to the success of the Allies was the overwhelming superiority in aviation, as well as a significant quantitative superiority in tanks. This made it possible to neutralize the qualitative superiority of the Germans

in armored vehicles. On June 6, D-Day, 288 German fighters were stationed in the West, and 550 on the Eastern Front. Another 250 fighters were in the Mediterranean, the Balkans and Norway, and 1179 machines were part of the Reich air defense, which fought almost exclusively with the Anglo-American aviation. And on June 22, on the day the Soviet offensive began in Belarus, only 441 fighters remained on the Eastern Front, there were 704 on the Western Front, 338 in other theaters, and 538 in German air defense. Immediately after the landing in Normandy, the SS tank corps, located in Poland, was transferred to the Western Front. This facilitated the conduct of the Soviet offensive in Belarus.

Undoubtedly, without the Allied landing in Normandy, the Soviet offensive in Belarus would not have been so disastrous for the Army Group Center, which, perhaps, would not have undergone such a total defeat. But it is equally indisputable that without the existence of the Soviet-German front, which diverted three-quarters of the Wehrmacht's ground forces, the landing of the Anglo-American troops in Normandy in June 1944 would have been impossible.

Before the landing in Normandy, the Red Army, excluding the battle of Stalingrad, took only thousands of Germans prisoner (most of all - 11 thousand - in the Korsun-Shevchenko "cauldron" in February 1944). Immediately after June 1944, a sharp increase in the irretrievable losses of the German ground forces begins. If in June they amounted to 26 thousand killed and 32 thousand missing, then in July - 59 thousand and 310 thousand, respectively, and in August - 64 thousand and 408 thousand. Only the troops of three Belarusian fronts in the period from 1 March to 1

In October 1944, 154 thousand Germans were taken prisoner, and the troops of the 1st Baltic Front - another 10 thousand. The vast majority of the prisoners were captured by these fronts in July and August, during Operation Bagration.

## The myth of Operation Bagration

The main myth of the Bagration operation, supported by Soviet and Russian historiography, is the assertion that the unprecedented success of the Soviet troops was achieved due to the fact that the offensive in Belarus turned out to be completely sudden for the German command, due to which, in particular, the Germans had almost four times less tanks than the Red Army. The superiority in manpower was not supposedly so overwhelming - only twofold. Although after the successes of the Soviet troops in the south, the

German Army Group Center, which was defending in Belarus, was deeply engulfed from the left flank, the Stavka tried to give the enemy the impression that the main blow would follow in Ukraine. However, this time the German command was promptly informed

about the plans of the enemy. At the end of April, an unknown German agent reported that two options were discussed in Moscow. The first of them provided for the main attack in the area of Kovel and Lvov, followed by a move to Warsaw, where a Polish uprising was supposed. It is possible that Soviet intelligence learned about the plans of the Home Army to try to raise uprisings in Warsaw, Vilna and other Polish cities when Soviet troops approached them. The second version of the summer campaign, which was adopted, assumed that the main blow would be delivered towards the Baltic Sea through the territory of Belarus and Poland, and the auxiliary one - in the south.

Nevertheless, Hitler did not begin to withdraw the Army Group Center to the Bug, which would have taken it out from under the expected Soviet strike, but at the same time would have brought the Red Army closer to the capital of the Reich by more than 300 kilometers. If this retreat had taken place, the Soviet troops would have reached the old Soviet-Polish border in Belarus already in May, and not at the end of July, as happened in reality. And then there was the expected landing of the allies in France. Hitler expected to repel it with a powerful tank counterattack and was ready to sacrifice

German troops in Belarus. If there is no Anglo-American landing or the troops already in France cope with it, then the 5 tank divisions concentrated in Poland, including the SS tank corps, will be able to strike at the advancing Soviet armies in Belarus or Ukraine and save Army Group Center and "Northern Ukraine" (formerly "South") from defeat. The Fuhrer rejected the proposal of Field Marshal Ernst Busch, commander of Army Group Center, to withdraw troops to the Berezina River and reduce the front by 240 kilometers. He also took one of the tank corps from Bush and handed it over to the commander of the Northern Ukraine group.

In June 1944, the defense front of the Army Group "Center" passed along the Vitebsk - Orsha - Mogilev - Zhlobin line, forming the so-called "Belarusian balcony", deeply covered from the south by Soviet troops. During the operation, codenamed "Bagration", it was supposed to break the Army Group "Center" and liberate Belarus and Lithuania, followed by an advance to the Vistula and East Prussia.

For the offensive, the forces of the 1st Belorussian Front, General Konstantin Rokossovsky, the 2nd Belorussian Front, General Georgy Zakharov, the 3rd Belorussian Front, General Ivan Chernyakhovsky, and the 1st Baltic Front, General Ivan Bagramyan, were involved. They numbered 2,411,600 men, reinforced by more than 31,000 guns, 5,200 tanks and 5,675 combat aircraft, including 2,519 fighters. On June 1, 1944, there were

only 442,053 officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers in the army group of Field Marshal Bush, and not 1.2 million, as Soviet memoirists and historians claimed. Only 258,604 people served in combat units. This gave the Soviet side a total numerical superiority of 5.5 times. In combat units, this advantage could be higher, reaching a ratio of 7:1. If we take into account that the front of the 2nd German army was not attacked, then the Soviet advantage in the offensive areas in Belarus was even greater. The most significant was the superiority of the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front. In terms of the total number of personnel, Rokossovsky's troops were 8.2 times superior to the 9th German Army, which numbered 140 thousand people. In combat units, the numerical superiority was even more significant.



In early June, the headquarters of Army Group Center reported to the OKH that none of the divisions of the army group was capable of withstanding a major enemy offensive. In early June, Army Group Center had 553 tanks, about 640 aircraft, including only 40 fighters.

Since the German reserves were transferred to Normandy, the fate of Army Group Center was a foregone conclusion. Most of its divisions were surrounded and destroyed. The Soviet Air Force finally achieved absolute air superiority, as the Luftwaffe urgently transferred the main forces from the Eastern Front to counter the landing Anglo-American troops. Only a fifth of all German fighters operated in the East. In order to misinform the enemy, Soviet troops in Eastern Belarus carried out

large-scale measures to strengthen the defense. However, such measures could hardly mislead the German command. After all, it was in no way going to attack in Belarus, and it was difficult for him to imagine that the Russians could seriously fear an offensive in this place, especially with the existing balance of forces. General Kurt Tippelskirch, the former commander of the 4th Army, recalled: "At the front of Army Group Center, the intentions of the enemy began to

emerge around June 10th. It was here, where the German command least expected an offensive, that evidently began to appear signs of major Russian preparations. Radio intelligence reported new armies; aviation noted an increase in rail traffic and heavy traffic on highways. As always, the AIR divisions, which worked perfectly, established that large forces of the Russian artillery deployed here began to zero in on a number of sectors of the front of the German army group. Prisoners reported the appearance behind enemy lines of "strike units". In the so-called "defensive areas", which were still held by less combat-ready units, the replacement of the latter by strong formations was noted. A few more days passed, and it became quite obvious to the command of Army Group Center that the enemy was deploying large forces on this front. In addition, the direction of the upcoming attacks on Bobruisk, Mogilev, Orsha and Vitebsk began to clearly emerge. The picture obtained as a result of comparing a wide variety of observations

The preparations of the enemy were so definite and clear that there was absolutely no room for the possibility of imitations and misleading.

On June 14, a meeting was held at the Chief of the General Staff of the Ground Forces with the participation of all the Chiefs of Staff of the Army Groups and Army. While the chiefs of staff of Army Group North and both southern groups unanimously reported that on their front there were no signs of preparations for the soon-to-be-anticipated Russian offensive, the chiefs of staff of Army Group Center were equally unanimous in pointing to the already almost completed the deployment of large Russian forces in front of the front of their armies. However, in the General Staff of the Ground Forces, Hitler was so deeply rooted - which was facilitated in no small measure by the categorical point of view of Model, who led the front in Galicia - a preconceived notion about the greatest likelihood of a Russian offensive on the front of the Northern Ukraine Army Group that they were already abandoning it. could not. Of course, the deployment of Russian forces in front of the front of Army Group Center could not be denied, but only a subordinate role was attributed to it in assessing Russian plans. Therefore, it was assumed that Army Group Center would be able to repel such an offensive, which would be undertaken, in all likelihood, only with the aim of pinning down its troops, with its own forces. The dominant point of view remained, suggesting that the Russians would deliver the main blow on the front of the Northern Ukraine Army Group. As a result, most of the tank divisions were concentrated there, and everyone was sure that it was there that, at last, it would be possible to oppose "blow to blow" again. At the request of Army Group Center to provide it with at least larger reserves, it was stated that the general situation on the Eastern Front did not allow for a different grouping of forces.

In fact, Hitler knew from the beginning of May that the Red Army was going to strike the main blow in Belarus. But to say frankly that after the landing of the allies in Normandy, when the only reserve of the Eastern Front - the SS Panzer Corps - had to be transferred from Poland to France, where most of the Luftwaffe went, there is nothing left but to bring the group

armies "Center" to sacrifice, the Fuhrer simply could not, so as not to cause demoralization of his

troops. Due to the huge numerical superiority of the enemy and the lack of air support, the German troops quickly depleted their ammunition supply and therefore could not hold the encircled fortresses in Eastern Belarus for any long time, which could not be supplied by air bridge.

Minsk was liberated on July 3, Grodno on July 16, and Brest on July 26. On July 8, units of the 1st Belorussian Front occupied Baranovichi. The 3rd Belorussian Front, in turn, captured Lida on July 9, and Vilnius on July 13. Already on July 18, Rokossovsky's troops crossed the Western Bug and entered the territory of the Polish Governor-General.

The Red Army bought success in Belarus at a high price. Soviet losses in the wounded and killed in July and August of the 44th were second only to the losses of July and August of the 43rd year, when they were the largest in the entire war. Soviet losses during the Belarusian operation, according to official data, from June 22 to August 29, 1944 2009 amounted to 765,813 people killed, wounded, missing, and departed due to illness, of which 178,507 people were irretrievably lost. In addition, the losses of the 1st Polish Army, which also participated in the Belarusian operation, during this period amounted to 5073 people, including 1533 - irretrievably. The data on the irretrievable losses of this army are clearly underestimated. After all, only for the period from August 1 to August 10, the 1st Polish Army lost 290 killed and 565 missing, as well as 684 wounded. It is incredible that in the remaining 52 days of the Belarusian operation, the irretrievable losses of the Poles amounted to only 678 dead and missing. It can be assumed that the irretrievable losses of the 1st Polish Army, as well as other troops participating in the Belarusian operation, are underestimated at least three times. In this case, the total irretrievable losses of the Soviet troops, including the 1st Army of the Polish Army, can be estimated at 540 thousand people. Army

Group Center was defeated in Belarus and lost 409.4 thousand soldiers and officers, including 255.4 thousand irrevocably, including about 80 thousand prisoners, while out of 38 divisions of Army Group Center, 28 were broken. Of the 47 generals who fought on

advanced as corps and division commanders, 31 were lost, with 21 taken prisoner.

## The myth of the Warsaw Uprising

The main myth of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, which was established in Soviet propaganda during the war years, and then repeated in Soviet and Russian historiography, is the assertion that the Red Army could not help the rebels, since they suffered heavy losses during the operation in Belarus, and the rebels did not coordinated with the Soviet command the time of the uprising.

The Warsaw Uprising was launched on August 1, 1944 by the Home Army, subordinate to the Polish government in London, led by General Count Tadeusz Bur-Komarovsky. It aimed to establish control over the Polish capital on the eve of the entry of the Red Army there and the deployment of the Polish government-in-exile there, with which the USSR broke off diplomatic relations in April 1943 after excavations in Katyn. Therefore, there was no way to coordinate the time of the uprising with the Soviet command, which was pursuing the AK detachments.

possibilities.

On July 20, 1944, Stalin created the pro-Soviet Polish National Liberation Committee in Chełm, which was soon transferred to Lublin. He claimed to be an alternative Polish government. According to the report of the German agents, back in the spring of 1944, when the plan for the summer campaign was discussed at the Soviet Headquarters and it was decided to strike the main blow in Belarus, it was assumed that an anti-German uprising would break out in Warsaw. Obviously, Stalin expected that in the conditions of approaching the city of the Red Army, the leadership of the uprising would be in the hands of the pro-communist People's Army. That is why, when the Red Army approached Warsaw, Moscow radio broadcast a call to the Warsaw people to raise an uprising. And it was after this call that the AK command set in motion the plan of the uprising. The army of Ludov could not compete with the Home Army in any way. The latter numbered about 380 thousand fighters by the summer of 1944, although not all of them were armed. The army of Ludov, in the whole of Poland, had no more than 30 thousand fighters. Therefore, individual detachments of the AL, who found themselves in

Warsaw, unconditionally submitted during the uprising to the command of the AK. From all over Poland, detachments of the Home Army made their way to Warsaw. The predominance of supporters of the London government among the Warsaw insurgents came as an unpleasant surprise to Stalin.

On the eve of the uprising, Polish Prime Minister Mikolajczyk arrived in Moscow. Stalin suggested that the London government should submit to the PCWP. Mikolajczyk expressed his willingness to cooperate with both the PCWN and the Red Army, but still insisted that only his government was the sole legitimate government of Poland. After that, Stalin changed his mind about seriously helping the Warsaw insurgents. There was no direct "stop order". It was too inconvenient for Anglo-American public opinion to stop the offensive on the central sector of the front just after the beginning of the uprising. It was easier to attack, but in such a way that Warsaw was not taken for the time being.

German General Kurt Tippelskirch recalled: "The uprising broke out on August 1, when the power of the Russian strike had already dried up and the Russians abandoned their intention to take the Polish capital on the move. As a result, the Polish rebels were left to their own devices. At first, their successes were stunning: most of the German military and civilian institutions located in this large city were cut off from the outside world; the train stations are occupied by insurgents who have mortars, 20 mm anti-aircraft guns and anti-tank weapons; city highways are blocked. Only the bridges over the Vistula were held. If the Russians continued to attack the bridgehead, the position of the German troops in the city would become hopeless. Now, in Warsaw itself and around it, sufficient forces could be concentrated to at least help the German institutions, regain the railway stations and prevent the transfer of all power in the city into the hands of the insurgents.

In late July - early August 1 - I Army of the Polish Army, in cooperation with the 69th, captured a bridgehead across the Vistula in the area of Pulawy, Demblin. Another bridgehead in the Magnuszew area was captured by the troops of the 8th Guards Army in cooperation with the 1st Army of the Polish Army. The 2nd Panzer Army was advancing on the right-bank

Warsaw suburb of Prague. However, by August 8, the Germans, who had pulled up tank divisions from the south, managed to localize Soviet breakthroughs on the outskirts of Warsaw,

destroying 327 tanks. After the failure of the first attempts to capture Warsaw on the move, Rokossovsky and Zhukov suggested that Stalin prepare and conduct the Warsaw offensive operation. They noted that "to carry out this operation, it is necessary to transfer Katukov's 1st Panzer Army from the 1st Ukrainian Front to the 1st Belorussian Front and send it from the Opatow region through Ostrovets, Senno, with the task of striking in a northerly direction to reach Front: Zvolen, Radom. The probable date for the start of the operation, the marshals called 25 August. In principle,

the Warsaw operation was quite feasible. All that was required was to transfer the 1st Tank Army to the 1st Belorussian Front and replenish the 1st and 2nd Tank Armies with armored vehicles, and all the armies with personnel and ammunition. In order to

break up the Warsaw grouping of the enemy and open a direct road to Berlin, it would be worthwhile, if only military-strategic considerations are taken into account, to postpone the Soviet offensive against Romania, scheduled for August 20th. If the Germans had been pushed back to the Oder, the German command would certainly have had to begin the transfer of troops from Romania to the Oder front, and the Romanian government in this case would certainly have withdrawn from the war and opened hostilities against the Wehrmacht.

However, the Home Army still held out in Warsaw. And so Stalin was in no hurry to occupy the Polish capital while a force beyond his control was fighting there. Iosif Vissarionovich preferred to rush to the Balkans in order to guarantee their transition to the Soviet sphere of influence and prevent the landing of the Western allies there. The plan for the Warsaw operation was approved by him, but the 1st Belorussian Front did not receive the necessary means of strengthening. And the failure of the

offensive was a foregone conclusion. Meanwhile, back in mid-August, German tank divisions, which had thoroughly battered the Soviet 2nd Panzer Army operating beyond the Vistula, were transferred to the Baltic coast in order to cut a corridor to Army Group North, which was cut off from Germany. The operation began on August 16, and in the very first c

the presence of tank divisions deployed from near Warsaw was recorded by intelligence of the 1st Baltic Front. By the end of the month, the Germans managed to push back the Soviet troops from the Baltic coast and restore land communications with Army Group North. But this operation lost its meaning in the event of a Soviet attack on Warsaw. The weakened German forces would not have been able to contain him, much less to keep the front from Latvia to the Oder in the north. However, the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front did not advance on the Vistula while the German 3rd Panzer Army made its way to the Baltic Sea at Tukums. On the other hand, a big offensive began in Romania, and on September 8, an unplanned offensive of two Soviet armies in the Carpathians began hastily to help the Slovak uprising, in which the communists played a prominent role.

On September 13, the 47th Army and the 1st Army of the Polish Army occupied the right-bank suburb of Warsaw, Prague. However, the Soviet troops did not support the courageous attempt of the Polish units of the 1st Army of the Polish Army under the command of General Berling to force the Vistula in close proximity to Warsaw. On September 16–19, up to six infantry battalions crossed the Vistula; On September 23, under the onslaught of superior enemy forces, the Poles, having suffered heavy losses, were forced to return to the eastern coast. The landing force was almost completely destroyed by the Germans. This seems to have been a planned failure that served as a pretext for Berling's removal from the post of commander of the 1st Polish Army. He aroused the displeasure of the Soviet leadership by accepting both soldiers and officers of the Home Army into his

army. On October 2, 1944, the more than two-month tragic epic of the Warsaw Uprising ended. The Home Army in Warsaw capitulated. Under the terms of the surrender, the rebels received the rights of combatants (legitimate participants in the war) and were sent to prisoner of war camps in Germany. The Germans promised not to deport the civilian population of Warsaw, but this promise was broken. Tens of thousands of Varsovians were killed, including about 16 thousand soldiers of the Home Army. Approximately the same number - about 17 thousand killed and missing - were lost by the Germans. About 20 thousand AK fighters were taken prisoner. The Germans even talked about 200 thou



dead rebels, but this number is exaggerated several times. By order of Hitler, the city was razed to the ground.

## The myth of the Iasi-Kishinev operation

The main myth of the Iasi-Kishinev operation, one of the most successful operations of the Soviet troops, is the assertion that the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, General Rodion Malinovsky and the 3rd Ukrainian Front, General Fyodor Tolbukhin, were able to destroy the main forces of the South Ukraine Army Group due to that the offensive turned out to be sudden for the enemy and the Soviet commanders were able to create an overwhelming superiority in forces and means in decisive directions, while the overall superiority of the Red Army was not so great. At the same time, they

forget that General Hans Frisner's Southern Ukraine Army Group suffered such a catastrophic defeat not only due to the low combat capability of the Romanian army, which accounted for about half of all the troops of the army group, but even more due to the fact that immediately after the encirclement near Iasi and Chisinau Romania changed fronts and declared war on Germany. As a result, the Romanian troops in the "cauldron" immediately capitulated, the remnants of the German troops who were outside the ring were forced to quickly leave Romania, and the German divisions remaining in the ring did not have to hope for either a deblocking strike or that they would be able to reach rolled back hundreds of kilometers of the new German front. The Iasi-Kishinev operation was carried out

from August 20 to August 29, 1944. Marshal Semyon Timoshenko coordinated the actions of the fronts as a representative of the Headquarters. The troops of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts consisted of 91 divisions, 6 tank and motorized corps and 4 tank and motorized rifle brigades. They numbered 1,314.2 thousand people, 16 thousand guns and mortars, 1,870 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 2,200 aircraft. They were opposed by the German-Romanian Army Group "Southern Ukraine" under the command of the German General Hans Frisner. It consisted of 24 German divisions, one battle group and two brigades, one Slovak division, 20 Romanian divisions and 6 Romanian brigades and consisted of about

900 thousand people, 7.6 thousand guns and mortars, 400 tanks and assault guns and 810 aircraft.

The entourage of the King of Romania, Mihai I, was looking for ways to conclude peace with the Anti-Hitler coalition. By August 1944, a conspiracy was formed against Antonescu, led by the king. In the event of a major Soviet offensive, it was assumed either to convince Antonescu to conclude a truce, or to arrest the dictator. As early as August 3, Frisner, convinced that the Antonescu government could be overthrown at any moment, sent letters to Hitler and Ribbentrop, as well as Guderian, demanding that all German troops and military institutions in Romania be subjugated. He also insisted: "If symptoms of fermentation reappear in the Romanian units at the front, it will be necessary to give an order to withdraw the army group beyond the Prut and further to the line of Galati, Focsany, spurs of the Eastern Carpathians." However, Hitler and Keitel did not give permission to withdraw, nor did they give Frisner the rights of commander in chief. Ribbentrop, who was worried about the situation in Rumania, proposed to send a tank division to Bucharest. But there were no free tank divisions on the Eastern Front. Then the idea arose to send the 4th SS police division from Yugoslavia to the Romanian capital, but Jodl opposed this, believing that it was necessary to fight Tito's partisans. In addition, from the end of June to August 13, the Southern Ukraine Army Group was forced to transfer 11 divisions to other sectors of the front. Beginning on August 7, German intelligence revealed signs of preparations for a Soviet offensive, but Army Group South Ukraine did not have the strength to counter it. Probably, in the event of a timely retreat beyond the Prut, the German-Romanian troops could have avoided disaster. However, in this case, most likely, Romania would have withdrawn from the war and the German troops of the Army Group "Southern Ukraine" would still be in a hopeless situation. On the other hand, if Romania had not withdrawn from the war, the Southern Ukraine Army Group, even after the encirclement in the Iasi region, would have been able to create a new front and try to release the encircled.

On August 19, Soviet troops conducted reconnaissance in force. The main offensive began on the morning of August 20 with a powerful artillery and air preparation. Frisner on August 21 gave the order to withdraw

for Prut. On the night of August 22, the sailors of the Danube military flotilla, together with the landing group of the 46th Army of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, crossed the 11-kilometer Dniester Estuary, liberated the city of Akkerman and began to develop an offensive in a southwestern direction. By the morning of August 22, the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front captured the Mare Ridge and entered the operational space.

Frisner recalled: "Due to the withdrawal of some Romanian formations from the battle, the enemy managed to quickly move his troops, and above all the tanks, which were already west of the Prut River, far to the south. On August 23, in the afternoon, Russian tanks appeared at Byrlad, and here stubborn battles with them were started by units of the weapons-technical school of the 8th Army that arrived in time from the south. In the evening of the same day, Soviet troops were already in the area east of Bacau.

18 German and Romanian divisions were surrounded. Stalin ordered not to be carried away by advancing deep into Romania, but first of all to put an end to the encircled group. On August 23, when it

became clear that the front had been broken through and the main forces of the Southern Ukraine Army Group were surrounded, Antonescu was going to announce additional mobilization in the country and, together with the Germans, create a new line of defense. For the approval of this decision, he arrived at the palace to King Michael I. But the king suggested that Antonescu immediately conclude a truce, and when he refused, believing that the consent of the Germans was required for a truce, he announced Romania's withdrawal from the war. The Romanian troops began to leave their positions, and those that were in the "cauldron" ceased resistance and surrendered. In Bucharest, a coalition government was formed with the participation of the Communists, headed by General Constantin Sănătescu, which demanded that the German troops leave Romanian territory as soon as possible. Hitler ordered to occupy Bucharest and return Antonescu to power. Anti-aircraft artillery units of the Luftwaffe, defending the oil-bearing region of Ploiesti, were sent to Bucharest with orders to capture all the key points of the city. On the morning of 24 August, the Luftwaffe bombed Bucharest. German infantry units were also transferred to the city. But these forces were too few, and their attempt to advance to the Romanian capital was repulsed. On August 25, Romania declared war on Germany, but the day before, the Romanian king called on the Romanian army

act against the Germans as against enemies. Meanwhile, 50 Soviet divisions were moving towards Bucharest, while 34 divisions liquidated the encircled group. As Frisner admitted, "the opportunity to break the enemy encirclement from the west and thereby alleviate the situation of the German troops engaged in heavy fighting was lost by the German command on August 25, when the Romanian troops began hostilities against the Germans and in the interior of Romania, in particular - in Wallachia."

By the beginning of September, the main forces of the encircled German troops had ceased resistance. Only captured German and Romanian troops lost about 209 thousand people. 2 thousand guns, 340 tanks and assault guns, almost 18 thousand vehicles and other military equipment were taken as trophies. Soviet losses, according to official figures, amounted to 67.1 thousand people, including 13.2 thousand - irretrievably. Taking into account the likely underestimation of Soviet irretrievable losses by a factor of three, the total losses of Soviet troops in the Iasi-Kishinev operation can be estimated at 94 thousand people.

Romania fielded 535,000 soldiers and officers to fight against Germany and its allies. About 120 thousand Romanian soldiers died in battles against German and Hungarian troops and died of wounds. More than 90 thousand people were injured. About 50 thousand Romanian soldiers and officers were taken prisoner, of which about 15 thousand people died in German and Hungarian captivity. The total losses of the dead and those who died in captivity amounted to about 135 thousand people.

## The myth of the Courland "cauldron"

The main myth of the Courland "cauldron" (or Courland "corral") is the assertion that it was an extremely successful implementation of the plan of the Soviet command, according to which one of the most powerful groupings of German troops for six months was isolated in a secondary theater of operations, far from the decisive battles.

The Courland "cauldron" was formed after the advanced units of the 5th Guards Tank Army reached the Baltic coast north and south of Memel on October 10, 1944, and Army Group North was isolated on the Courland Peninsula. Its supply could only be carried out through the ports of Liepaja and Ventspils, closest to Königsberg, Pillau and other German ports. It was not possible to use Riga for supply, since the ships would then have to make a long journey along the Gulf of Riga and bypassing the Courland Peninsula under the dominance of the Soviet Baltic fleet and aviation. Therefore, the German command decided to leave Riga and retreat to a shorter front line. In early October, all rear units of Army Group North were withdrawn to Courland. The Estonian 20th SS Division and other Estonian units were transferred to the Reich. 22,500 Soviet prisoners of war with 3,440 civilians were transported to the Moonsund Islands. By October 4, preparations were completed for the abandonment of Riga, and an order was given to carry out Operation Thunder - the withdrawal of Army Group North to Courland. But the 1st Baltic Front launched an attack on Memel before the Germans had withdrawn from Riga and were able to release forces to fend off this threat.

On October 10, the troops of the 2nd Baltic Front launched an assault on Riga, and Scherner ordered the evacuation of the city to begin immediately.

On October 13, troops of the 2nd Baltic Front occupied the eastern part of Riga. On this day, German sappers blew up the railway bridge across the Dvina. On October 15, they captured Zadvinye, completely liberating the city. Nevertheless, the German command managed to withdraw

on the Courland Peninsula the main forces of the Army Group "North" and organize stubborn resistance there. Already

on October 20, the Soviet offensive completely stopped. It was not possible to liquidate the Courland "cauldron" on the move. A long siege began. Army Group North, renamed Army Group Courland in January 1945, resisted until the general surrender of the Wehrmacht and laid down arms only on May 8, 1945

of the year.

A negative role in the conduct of operations to liberate the Baltic states was played by the fact that there was no proper coordination of actions between the fronts that carried them out.

Marshal Vasilevsky recalled: "On August 29, I was released from directing the operations of the 3rd Belorussian Front and they entrusted me with all three Baltic Fronts. But from September 30, I was again entrusted with the leadership of the 3rd Belorussian and 1st Baltic fronts, and the leadership of the 2nd and 3rd Baltic fronts was assigned to the commander of the Leningrad Front, L. A. Govorov. On October 16, the 2nd Baltic was added to me, which absorbed troops from the disbanded 3rd. Only the Leningrad Front was left behind Govorov. On November 8, so that I could concentrate all my attention on the Baltic, the commander of the 3rd Belorussian Front was directly subordinated to the Headquarters. And in the winter of 1944/45, the Baltic fronts were again given to Govorov, and so on. It should also be noted that in the midst of the battles for the Baltic states, Vasilevsky got into a car accident and was completely out of action for ten days.

On the contrary, throughout the battles for the Baltic States, the Germans maintained unity of command within the framework of the North Army Group, and later on, the Courland Army Group. The German command, using the developed road network of the Baltic states, quickly transferred troops to threatened points, and, if necessary, removed them from the threat of encirclement. In addition, Army Group North had fortified lines prepared in advance, which made it possible to hold back the superior forces of the Red Army for a long time. And through the Baltic ports, the Germans had the opportunity to freely receive ammunition and food. All these factors have led to

the fact that the troops in Courland surrendered only as part of the general surrender of

the Wehrmacht. Initially, the German troops cut off in Courland consisted of 33 divisions and one brigade of up to 700 thousand people. They were opposed by the troops of the 1st and 2nd Baltic fronts. In early February, the 1st Baltic Front was merged into the 2nd Baltic Front, commanded by Marshal Leonid Govorov, who remained part-time commander of the Leningrad Front. The German command gradually transferred the most combat-ready divisions for the defense of East Prussia and Pomerania. So, already at the end of October, the headquarters of the 29th tank corps went to Germany with the tank division "Grossdeutschland" and two infantry divisions. On October 21, Scherner issued the following order: "The Führer ordered to hold Courland and for the time being go on the defensive along the current front line. Our task, especially now, is not to surrender a single inch of land on the territory we currently hold, to pin down the 150 enemy formations opposing us, to beat them where the opportunity presents itself, and thereby facilitate the defense of the homeland. Since the front line was

short, not exceeding 200 km, the density of the German defense was extremely high. The chief of staff of the 2nd Baltic Front, General Leonid Sandalov, testified: "The command of the army group turned the Courland Peninsula into a continuous fortified area. The entire territory of the peninsula was covered with defensive lines with field and long-term fortifications and various barriers, including those with continuous minefields. The defenders received all the necessary supplies by sea through the ports of Libava (Liepāja) and Vindava (Ventspils). Thus, in October, 881 thousand tons of cargo were received, in November - 1,577 thousand tons, and in December - 1,112 thousand tons of cargo. The Soviet Baltic Fleet was unable to block the Courland Peninsula from the sea. By December 1, 1944, the Courland group, together with the Luftwaffe and the fleet, numbered 505.5 thousand people. Repeated Soviet attacks resulted in very little progress.

In December 1944 and January 1945, the Germans managed to evacuate five infantry and one tank division from Courland.



The number of the Courland grouping decreased to 399.5 thousand people. Eight Soviet armies, two tank and mechanized corps acted against it. Once again, the Soviet troops went on the offensive on January 24, 1945. They managed to make a dangerous breakthrough to Libau, which, however, was localized by a counterattack of German tanks. In mid-February, Chief of the General Staff Guderian insisted on the evacuation of Army Group Courland. Calculations showed that it can be taken out in 15 days. However, Hitler decided to leave the troops in place, as they were pinning down the vastly outnumbered Soviet troops. During the fighting, which lasted until mid-March, the Soviet troops, having lost up to 70 thousand killed and wounded, were able to capture only the city of Dzhukste. In March, two motorized and one infantry divisions were evacuated to Germany. On March 18, Soviet attacks resumed, but by the end of March,

the attackers were exhausted, having lost 263 tanks. During these battles, one German infantry division was defeated. Only after the end of this battle, the most combat-ready formations of Soviet troops from Courland were transferred to East Prussia. Only six Soviet armies remained in Courland. Up to this point, the heavily outnumbered encircled Soviet forces had sapped their strength in senseless attacks on German fortified positions. Perhaps Stalin feared that Anglo-American troops might land in Courland and try to restore the independence of the Baltic States. Therefore, he tried to occupy Courland until the general surrender. The urgent evacuation of Courland, which could have begun as early as April, was sanctioned by the new Wehrmacht Commander-in-Chief, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz,

only on May 3. Troops were allowed to abandon equipment and heavy weapons. On May 9, 1945, as part of the general surrender, Army Group Courland capitulated. On this day, it was possible to send about 24 thousand soldiers and officers to Germany in the last convoys. About 192 thousand people were taken prisoner, including 42 generals. More than 10 thousand fighters of the 19th Latvian SS division deserted and formed the backbone of the "forest brothers" detachments or went home.

## The myth of the Battle of Budapest

The myth of the battle for Budapest lies in the assertion that the capital of Hungary was defended by selected German troops and Hitler demanded to keep the city at any cost.

On October 2, 1944, the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front began the Debrecen operation. As a result, a bridgehead was captured on the western bank of the Tisza south of Szolnok. In the Oradea area, the German 76th Infantry Division was defeated. On October 10, the German command launched a counterattack and cut off the 6th Panzer Army. An oncoming tank battle began in the Debrecen area between this army and two German tank divisions. It lasted until

October 14, when the Soviet tankers managed to break through the encirclement. On October 20, the 6th Guards Tank Army and the 33rd Rifle Corps captured Debrecen.

At the end of September, Horthy sent to Moscow the chief of the Hungarian gendarmerie, Field Marshal Lieutenant Laszlo Farago, a former military attache in the USSR, who spoke Russian well. On October 11, he initialed the armistice agreement.

On 15 October Horthy's statement was broadcast over the radio in Budapest saying that since Germany had already lost the war, Hungary needed to take care of its own interests. Horthy announced that he intended to appeal to the USSR, the USA and England with a request to inform him of the terms of the armistice. He claimed that, retreating from the eastern regions of the country, German troops "plundered and devastated our lands, leaving behind ruins and ashes." On October 16, German special forces, with the assistance of some Hungarian units, arrested Regent Horthy in Budapest and took him to Germany, where he was under house arrest until the end of the war. Ferenc Szalasi, the leader of the pro-Nazi Hungarian Arrow Cross party, was appointed regent. After the arrest of Horthy, the commander of the 1st Hungarian Army, Colonel-General Bela Miklos, on October 16, together with his headquarters, went over to the side of the Red Army. About 6 thousand Hungarian soldiers and officers followed his example. Before that, Miklos issued an appeal to the Hungarian army,

where he announced the conclusion of a truce and called on the Hungarian soldiers to fight against the Germans. However, the German command and the new Hungarian authorities managed to keep the bulk of the Hungarian army

on their side. On October 23, two German army and one tank corps launched a counterattack and, uniting in the Nagykallo-Uyfeherto area, cut off the communications of the cavalry-mechanized group of General Pliev. On October 26, she was forced to leave Nyiregyhaza, while the 30th Cavalry Division and the 3rd Tank Brigade suffered heavy losses. A significant part of the Pliev group broke through to their own, but they had to abandon tanks and heavy weapons. After that, the army group of Veler, consisting of the 8th German and 1st Hungarian armies, was able to withdraw to the

western bank of the Tisza. On October 28, the Debrecen operation ended. Soviet troops took 42,000 prisoners, mostly Hungarians. The commander of the 6th German Army, Maximilian Fretter-Pico, wrote in a report: "The bad example of some Hungarian units negatively affects the state of the troops."

Before the start of the battle for Budapest, the German-Hungarian troops of Army Group South, General Hans Frisner, numbered 190 thousand people. The troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front of Marshal Malinovsky and the 46th Army of the 3rd Ukrainian Front of Marshal Tolbukhin who opposed them had 720 thousand people. Soviet troops outnumbered the enemy by 3.7 times in infantry, twice in tanks, 4.5 times in artillery, and 2.5 times in aircraft. On October 30, the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front went on the offensive with the aim of reaching the Danube and capturing Budapest. The defense of the Hungarian troops was broken even during reconnaissance in force. On November 2, Soviet troops came from the south to the near approaches to Budapest, but they could not break into the city on the move. Only by November 26 did Soviet troops reach the outer defensive contour of Budapest. On December 5, troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front reached the Danube north and northwest of Budapest, cutting off the escape route to the north for the Budapest grouping. Meanwhile, the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, with the forces of the 57th, 46th and 4th Guards Armies and the 1st Bulgarian Army, crossed the Danube and reached positions northeast of Lake Balaton. On December 20, the troops of two fronts broke

enemy north and southwest of Budapest. December 24 Budapest was completely surrounded. On December 29, the Soviet command sent an ultimatum to the encircled garrison to surrender, which was rejected.

The troops, which were

soon surrounded in the Hungarian capital, numbered only 79 thousand people - 41 thousand Germans and 38 thousand Hungarians.

By that time, the Hungarian units had very low morale and even defended their own capital without enthusiasm, anticipating the inevitable defeat and the imminent end of the war. But the German troops in the Budapest garrison, for the most part, did not possess high fighting qualities. Here were the newly formed Hungarian SS divisions, and the people's grenadier divisions hastily sent to the front. Hitler did not attach much value to him and was ready to sacrifice him, if only he would pull the Soviet troops back and slow down the Soviet offensive in Western Hungary. Then, in the event of a successful counterattack by the SS tank divisions, he hoped to recapture the Hungarian capital and restore the defenses along the Danube. The German-Hungarian group surrounded in Budapest included low-combat and inactive formations (this

was especially true of the Hungarian divisions), which were unable to deliver an effective blow towards the deblocking group. Therefore, Hitler insisted on the defense of Budapest to the last possible. He knew that the troops defending him were not suitable for maneuvering and would be easily destroyed if they tried to break out of the city on their own. Frisner admitted: "The 18th SS Cavalry Division, formed mainly from Hungarian Germans, was completely demoralized and surrendered piecemeal to the enemy." The 22nd

SS Cavalry Division, which also consisted of Hungarian Volksdeutsche, was a little better defending Budapest. To storm Budapest, the command of the 2nd Ukrainian Front formed a special Budapest group of troops consisting of three rifle corps and nine artillery brigades. It was headed

by the commander of the 18th Guards Rifle Corps, General Ivan Afonin.

On January 24, 1945, he was seriously wounded and replaced by the commander of the 53rd Army, General Ivan Managarov. The German-Hungarian garrison of Budapest (a special group "Budapest", which consisted of the 18th and 22nd SS cavalry divisions and the 6th Hungarian army corps and several separate units) was headed by the commander of the 9th SS Volunteer Mountain Rifle Corps and the commander of the SS troops and the Hungarian police Obergruppenführer Karl Pfeffer Wildenbruch. He was taken prisoner on February 12, 1945. During the fierce fighting, a large number of civilians were killed. Nearly a million people in Budapest were not evacuated. Peaceful life in the city continued as early as November 1944, when Soviet tanks stood on the outskirts of Budapest, and Hungarian soldiers traveled to positions on trams. Budapest was not prepared for defense at all and was not fortified, although Hitler declared it

a fortress. The Budapest group made an attempt to break through on the night of February 12, 1945, when all hope of outside help had already evaporated, and the ammunition had run out. Only 785 people got to their own. By February 15, the city was completely cleared of German and Hungarian troops. During the Budapest operation, the Soviet troops lost, according to official figures, 80 thousand killed and missing and 240 thousand wounded and sick, as well as 1766 tanks and self-propelled guns. In addition, in the Debrecen operation, the losses of Soviet troops amounted to about 20 thousand dead and missing and more than 64 thousand wounded. The true size of irretrievable losses is most likely underestimated by 2-3 times. The allied Red Army Romanian troops lost 42.7 thousand killed and missing. There is no exact data on the losses of the German-Hungarian troops. According to some estimates, the Germans and Hungarians in the battles for Budapest lost 48 thousand killed, 26 thousand wounded and 63 thousand prisoners, including 42 thousand Hungarian prisoners captured during the Debrecen operation.

## Myth of the Battle of the Bulge

The main myth of the Battle of the Ardennes is that in the course of its allies were on the verge of defeat, and only the advance of the Red Army on the Vistula, launched ahead of schedule, saved the Anglo-American troops from defeat. Soviet historiography began to develop this myth shortly after the end of the war.

At the end of August, the German command decided to launch a strategic counteroffensive in the West. Such an offensive in the East did not make sense because of the vastness of the territory of this theater of operations. In October 1944, Hitler decided to launch a large-scale offensive in the Ardennes in December with the participation of two tank armies. It received two code names at once - "Autumn Fog" and "Watch on the Rhine". The aim of the offensive was to capture the port of Antwerp. The calculation was that with the fall of Antwerp, the conditions for supplying the allied forces would deteriorate sharply. The Germans hoped to capture also Brussels and most of the Belgian territory, defeating more than one-third of all American divisions operating on the Western Front. Hitler hoped that heavy losses would force the Americans to seek a compromise peace. The American troops had less combat experience than the British, and the German command believed that they would be easier to deal with.

By mid-December, the Allies had 63 divisions on the Western Front, including 16 armored divisions. They had about 10 thousand tanks and self-propelled guns and about 8 thousand combat aircraft. The number of allied armies was about 3.8 million people, but the vast majority of them were in the rear. Since the Americans did not expect offensives in the Ardennes, which were difficult to pass in winter, only five divisions were located here, numbering 83 thousand people, 242 tanks, 182 self-propelled guns and 394 guns. Only one line of defense was prepared. The Germans, on this sector of the front, involved up to 250 thousand people, 970 tanks and assault guns, about 800 aircraft, 2617 guns and mortars. However, the shock group was provided with fuel only at half the depth of the operation.

The Germans in the West had 73 divisions, including 11 tank divisions, and 3 tank brigades with 1,200 tanks and assault guns. They were supported by 2292 combat aircraft. At the rate

allies, many German divisions had a shortage of personal

composition of 30–40% and were equal in strength to only 39 allied. The German army in the West numbered 1.3 million people, of which about 420 thousand people were directly in the combat units of the ground forces. The number of allied troops opposing them can be estimated at 730 thousand people.

The Germans managed to keep the concentration of troops secret thanks to a well-executed disinformation campaign. The offensive began on December 16, when inclement weather set in and the Allies could not take advantage of their air superiority. Using the factor of surprise, the Germans expected to reach the Antwerp area on the 7th day. The strike force included 7 tank, 11 infantry and 2 parachute divisions. The main blow was delivered by the 6th SS Panzer Army of Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich and the 5th Panzer Army of General Hasso von Manteuffel. The attackers had a twofold superiority in tanks. By December 21, the Germans managed to capture the important transport hub of Saint-Vith, defeat the 106th and 99th American infantry divisions and get close to Bastogne, where there were large fuel depots, which the German tanks so lacked. With the start of the offensive, Eisenhower transferred the 18th American Airborne Corps from the reserve to the Ardennes, the 101st Airborne Division of which occupied Bastogne. In total, three airborne and armored divisions numbering 60 thousand people were transferred to the battlefield. Her tenacity thwarted German plans for a rapid advance towards the Meuse. On December 18, the 82nd Airborne Division defeated the 1st SS Panzer Regiment, which lost all of its 39 tanks. On December 23, with the improvement of the

weather, Allied aviation began to actively operate. 3,000 aircraft bombed the advancing columns and their rears. 600 German fighters could not reliably cover their troops. In addition, since December 21, the Germans began to feel a shortage of fuel. On December 22, the offensive of the 3rd American army of George Patton began to relieve Bastogne. On December 25, in the Selle area, 6 km from the Meuse, the German 2nd Panzer Division lost 80

tanks due to lack of fuel. After the war, Guderian asserted: "On December 24, it was clear to every sane soldier that the offensive had definitively failed." On December 26, Bastogne was released, and the German offensive stopped. By that time, all divisions of the shock group had already been introduced into battle. There were no reserves, and there was no way to withdraw divisions from the already weakened Eastern Front, where a powerful Soviet offensive was expected. The Germans in the Ardennes managed to advance 90 km. By this time, the Americans had deployed 15 divisions numbering 248 thousand people to the German offensive area. On December 30, the Germans tried to encircle Bastogne again, but failed. Already on December 26, the German command began to prepare the transfer of two infantry divisions from the West to Hungary. At this point, Hitler had already decided that Antwerp could not be taken, and the further offensive pursued only private goals - to take Bastogne and improve the position of German troops in Alsace. On January 1, at a meeting with the Fuhrer, it was decided not to continue the offensive with strategic goals, but to launch a series of private strikes in order to prevent the Anglo-American troops from creating shock groups to go on the offensive. January 1, 1031 German aircraft bombed the Allied

airfields in Belgium, Holland and France, destroying 156 aircraft, but losing 277 aircraft. On the same day, the German offensive began in Alsace, the purpose of which was to encircle five divisions of the 7th American Army. In the first two days, it was successful, including because Eisenhower withdrew one armored and one infantry division from Alsace to his reserve, but already on January 4, the Germans were stopped by a counterattack of the allied forces. The next day, Army Group Upper Rhine, nominally commanded by SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, went on the offensive, pushing the unfired American units that had just arrived at the front almost to Strasbourg. Here the American reserves stopped the enemy. The offensive of the 19th German army from Colmar was stopped by French troops 30 km from Strasbourg at the last bridge in front of the city. On January 4, German panzer divisions began to withdraw from Bastogne to help the 6th SS Panzer Army, which was under heavy counterattacks. Already 8



January Hitler authorized the withdrawal of four of its divisions from the front for transfer to the Eastern Front, where a Soviet offensive was expected. However, they were not intended to repel him, but to launch a counteroffensive in Hungary with the aim of deblocking the encircled Budapest. Thus, even before the start of the Soviet offensive on the Vistula, the German offensive in the Ardennes was stopped.

On January 13, the day after the start of the Soviet offensive on the Vistula, the 1st and 3rd American armies launched a counteroffensive in the Ardennes. In mid-January, Anglo-American aircraft disabled railroad tracks and rolling stock, as well as many tanks and vehicles. By January 28, the Germans had retreated to their original positions in both the Ardennes and Alsace. The Germans only managed to delay the Allied offensive from late December to early February. Five tank divisions,

several infantry divisions and tank brigades were withdrawn from the Western Front, but only two infantry and one motorized division were sent to repel the Soviet offensive in Poland. The main forces were intended for a counteroffensive in Hungary, conceived even before the start of the Vistula-Oder operation. The Soviet offensive certainly made it easier for the Americans to recapture their lost positions. However, even without this counteroffensive, the Germans would no longer have a chance to achieve their goals in the Ardennes and Alsace. American losses amounted to 19 thousand killed, 15 thousand

prisoners and 47 thousand wounded. The British lost 200 killed and 1,200 wounded. The loss of the French troops amounted to several hundred killed and wounded. The Germans lost 81,834 men, including 12,652 killed, 38,600 wounded and 30,582 missing. The Americans took up to 23 thousand prisoners. The Americans and the British lost 733 tanks and self-propelled guns, the Germans - about 600 tanks and assault guns.

## The myth of the battles at Lake Balaton

The main myth of the two tank battles at Lake Balaton in January and March 1945 was created by German generals shortly after the end of the war and consisted in the assertion that both offensives were undertaken at the whim of Hitler and did not make any sense, especially considering that at that time the Soviet troops stood on the outskirts of Berlin. In Soviet historiography, it was also argued that during the battles at Balaton, German losses, especially in tanks, were significantly greater than on the Soviet side. In fact, Hitler's close attention

to Hungary was due to the fact that by the end of 1944 Germany had lost oil fields and refineries to Romania, which had gone over to the side of the Anti-Hitler coalition. Practically all German plants for the production of synthetic fuel were put out of action by the Anglo-American aviation. The only oil fields and refineries remaining at the disposal of the Reich were in the Austrian Zisterdorf and in the Hungarian territory southwest of Balaton in the Nagykanizsa region. Hitler, at that time, was considering a plan for a long-term defense of the Alpine Fortress, and for the success of such a defense, it was necessary at all costs to keep the oil fields and

refineries of Western Hungary and Eastern Austria. It was possible to hold this area more or less reliably if it were possible to move the defense line to such a serious water barrier as the Danube. This goal was to achieve the operation to deblock Budapest. The counterattack was delivered by the 6th Army of General Hermann Balck, whose striking force was the 4th SS Panzer Corps of General Herbert Gille. The combat effectiveness of the Hungarian army by that time was low.

The offensive began on the evening of January 1, 1945 without artillery preparation. The whole calculation was on surprise. The offensive in the dark guaranteed against the attacks of the Soviet air force dominating the air. The Luftwaffe, due to lack of fuel, did not

could actively support their troops. There was no point in carrying out own artillery preparation in the dark due to its low efficiency, so it was abandoned. From the very first hours, the

attackers encountered dense minefields at the exits from the mountains. However, tactically, in time and place, the German offensive was sudden.

The main blow was directed against the 4th Guards Army, which captured Szekesfehervar. The Germans advanced up to 30 km. In turn, the Budapest grouping of German-Hungarian troops, trying to break through the encirclement, pushed the units of the 46th Army and captured Esztergom, but could not advance further.

During the breakthrough of the front of the 4th Guards Army, it turned out that the infantry, under the onslaught of tanks, retreated in disorder and left the artillery without cover. Most of the anti-tank obstacles, the German tanks were able to bypass. As a result, the artillery of the 31st Guards Corps lost 70% of its equipment and up to two-thirds of its personnel, since many batteries and anti-tank strongholds were surrounded.

On January 4, 1945, the divisions of the Gille corps reached the area of the city of Tat. Here they were met by the 12th anti-tank artillery brigade from the reserve of the 46th army. Parts of the 86th Rifle Division withdrew in disarray, and the artillerymen were again left without infantry cover and suffered losses. However, anti-tank artillery units from the reserve arrived in time to stop the German offensive. In total, the Soviet grouping had 1305 guns and large-caliber mortars and 210 tanks and self-propelled guns. On January 7,

the Germans tried to break through to Budapest from the area northwest of Szekesfehervar. By the end of the day, Soviet troops left Zamol and retreated 4-5 kilometers to the area north of Szekesfehervar. Then Gille withdrew a significant part of the Viking from the battle and transferred it to Gron. From there, together with the 711th Infantry Division, on January 10, they launched an attack on Budapest through the Pilis Mountains. The distance to the surrounded Budapest group was reduced to 2-3 kilometers. But the Soviet resistance intensified, and the Budapest group had almost no heavy weapons and fuel left, and it could not break through the inner front of the encirclement.

On January 18, the German command resumed the offensive from the area north of Lake Balaton, where five tank divisions were secretly transferred. The offensive turned out to be unexpected for the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. On the morning of January 20, the Germans reached the Danube in the areas of Dunapentele and Adon. Separate tank units also reached the approaches to Dunafeldvar, where the front headquarters was located, guarded by only one battery of 45-mm anti-tank guns. The 3rd Ukrainian Front was cut in two. The situation was complicated by the fact that on the eve of a strong ice drift demolished all pontoon crossings across the Danube. However, this ice drift ultimately saved the 3rd Ukrainian Front from even more trouble, because it prevented the Germans from crossing the Danube and seizing a bridgehead for an attack on Budapest.

Thanks to the night vision devices used for the first time during the advance to Budapest with infrared night sights, which ensured firing at a distance of up to 400 meters, German tanks and assault guns fired very accurately at night. In order to reduce the effect of the use of infrared sights by the Germans, the Red Army soldiers burned fires in front of their positions.

On January 19, the Viking crossed the Sharviz Canal at Kalosh and Shoponya. By that time, according to tradition, the Soviet rifle units were the first to retreat to the eastern bank of the canal, leaving artillerymen on the western bank, who almost all died, but detained the enemy. To meet the grouping that had broken through, the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front advanced the 133rd Rifle Corps with two IPTAPs and the 18th Tank Corps with a SU-76 regiment. These troops entered the battle on the move, scattered and without proper preparation. They were defeated by Viking tankers and partially surrounded, although due to the small number of German troops, the ring was not tight. On January 21, the remnants of the surrounded went to the location of the 57th Army.

On January 21, German tanks occupied Szekesfehervar. Two brigades of the 1st Guards Mechanized Corps, equipped with Sherman tanks, entered the battle on the move and lost 70% of their military equipment. Shermans with narrow tracks found it difficult to maneuver in the mud, which was formed due to frequent thaws. Complete destruction of the corps

prevented the SU-100 regiment, urgently thrown to his aid. The German grouping was stopped 26–29 km from Budapest.

On January 27, the offensive of the Soviet troops began from the Nagy Dunapentele area on the communications of the 4th SS Panzer Corps. The SS Panzer divisions had to turn their front to the south. On January 29, a large tank battle took place at Pettend, in which Soviet losses amounted to 200 tanks. This was the result of the fact that the commanders of the 18th and 23rd tank corps, contrary to instructions from above, used not self-propelled and anti-tank artillery to fight enemy tanks, but tanks, and suffered heavy losses from the "royal tigers" that were superior to Soviet tanks. and panthers. But on January 30, the positions of the 2nd German Panzer Army south of Balaton were subjected to Soviet attacks, the SS Panzer Corps, due to flank threats, was forced to retreat west on both sides of Velence and abandon attempts to unlock Budapest.

The irretrievable losses of the Germans during the first Battle of Balaton amounted to 82 tanks and assault guns, including 7 "Royal Tigers" and 31 "Panthers". According to German data, in the January battles, the Viking and Totenkopf divisions lost about 8 thousand people killed, including about 200 officers. They bore the brunt of the attack. For a new offensive, the 6th SS Panzer

Army of Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich, consisting of four tank divisions, was urgently transferred to Hungary from the Western Front. If the 6th SS Panzer Army had been sent to Silesia or Pomerania, as Guderian suggested, then the Soviet troops in Hungary would have launched an offensive in mid-March, as planned, and would have taken possession of the oil fields and refineries in Hungary and Austria, as well as the Austrian capital no more than two weeks. And by the end of March, the tanks in Pomerania would have been left without fuel. From Hitler's point of view, there was not only military-economic, but also military-strategic logic in the transfer of the 6th SS Army to Hungary. Until mid-April, the Fuhrer was going to defend himself not in Berlin, but in the "Alpine Fortress", which included Austria and Bavaria, as well as the surrounding regions of Italy and the Czech Republic. Hungary just covered the "Alpine fortress" from the east. And it is no coincidence that it was in the south that the most devoted to Hitler and combat-ready were concentrated.

SS divisions. They were supposed to defend the Alpine Fortress. Hitler hoped, with the help of the army of Sepp Dietrich, to push back the Soviet troops to the Danube. He did not expect to encircle and destroy the troops of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts, taking into account the limitations of his own forces.

Taking these considerations into account, we can say that the defeat of the 6th SS Panzer Army at Lake Balaton was one of those events that predetermined the collapse of the Alpine Fortress idea.

The 6th Panzer Army was transferred in the strictest secrecy. Its divisions disguised themselves as training engineering units. But in the period from February 18 to 25, the SS divisions "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" and "Hitler Youth" were used to eliminate the bridgehead on the Gron River, occupied by the 7th Guards Army of General Mikhail Shumilov, and the redeployment of the army ceased to be a secret. The Germans sacrificed surprise in order to eliminate the dangerous Soviet bridgehead and thereby exclude the possibility of an immediate Soviet attack on Vienna.

The last large-scale German offensive in World War II began on the night of March 6, 1945. The main blow was inflicted on a 30-kilometer section between Lakes Balaton and Velence. The target of the offensive was the city of Dunafeldvar on the Danube. All attacks began without aviation and artillery preparation. More than 300 tanks and assault guns of the Leibstandarte and the Hitler Youth division took part in the offensive. Some of them, together with the infantry, made their way at the junction of the 4th Guards and 26th Armies and by the end of the day wedged into the positions of the 30th Rifle Corps to a depth of 3–4 km. There was a threat of a breakthrough of the main line of Soviet def

By March 9, and at the 3rd Ukrainian Front, all army and front reserves were used up, and Stalin forbade using the 9th Guards and 6th Guards Tank Armies to repel an enemy attack, intended for an attack on Vienna. However, the Germans were used up all the reserves. In ten days of fierce fighting, the 6th SS Panzer Army managed to advance only 15–30 km. On March 15, the German offensive was stopped, and on March 16, the Soviet offensive against Vienna began.

The failures of the Soviet troops at the beginning of the fighting in the area of Lake Balaton and for the Gronskey bridgehead caused a formidable directive of the Headquarters of March 6, 1945, signed by Stalin and Chief of the General Staff Antonov. It said: "Recently, on

some fronts, there have been cases of carelessness and idleness, using which the enemy managed to inflict sudden and sensitive blows on us. As a result of these strikes, our troops were forced to withdraw. The retreat in these cases was unorganized, the troops suffered heavy losses in manpower and especially in materiel. So, for example: 1. 7th Guards. the army of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, which was defending east of Komarno, being attacked by the enemy,

failed to repulse its offensive, despite the sufficient number of forces and means, left the operationally important bridgehead that was occupying it (on the western bank of the river Gron), while losing personnel - 8194 people, 459 guns of various calibers (of which 374 were 76 mm and above), tanks and SU-54s. 2. Units of the 26th Army of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, advancing along the Sherviz Canal, went deep into the enemy defenses for 3–5 km. The enemy, having launched a counterattack, easily

broke through the battle formations of our advancing units, which did not have serious artillery support, since all their artillery was simultaneously removed from positions and moved forward. As a result of two days of fighting, units of the 133rd and 135th sks of the 26th Army lost 42 mortars, 90 guns of various calibers and were thrown back to their original position. The Headquarters of the Supreme High Command believes that these cases could have taken place only as a result of criminal carelessness, poor organization of defense, lack of intelligence and control by higher commanders and their headquarters over the position and actions of the troops.

The commanders of the troops of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts did not consider it necessary to report these shameful facts to the Headquarters in a timely manner, apparently wanting to hide them, and the General Staff had to get this information from the headquarters of the fronts over the head of the front commanders.

The Headquarters points out the commander of the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, Marshal of the Soviet Union Malinovsky and the 3rd Ukrainian Front, Marshal of the Soviet Union Tolbukhin, to poor control over

the actions of the troops, the unsatisfactory organization of reconnaissance and the inadmissibility of not submitting a report to the Headquarters about the losses indicated above.

The headquarters

orders: a) the commander of the 7th Guards. army Colonel-General Shumilov reprimand for carelessness and poor organization of defense;

b) the commanders of the troops of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts in these cases conduct a rigorous investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Report the results of the investigation and the measures taken. During the March offensive, the 6th SS Panzer Army irretrievably lost 42 tanks and assault guns. Another 396 tanks and assault guns needed mid-term and long-term repairs. All this damaged equipment was later left on the battlefield during a hasty retreat. Also, due to a lack of fuel, the Germans had to abandon a number of serviceable tanks, having previously blown them up. The Soviet troops opposing the 6th Army irretrievably lost 165 tanks and self-propelled guns. But the total irretrievable losses of armored vehicles of the 6th SS Panzer Army were much higher. During the retreat, Dietrich's tankers had to abandon almost all the tanks and assault guns damaged during the second Battle of Balaton, as well as at the first stage of the Vienna operation, when the fighting took place on the territory of Hungary. In total, 882 tanks, assault guns and armored personnel carriers were lost, of which 185 were captured by the Soviet troops in good condition. The result of the actions of the 6th SS Panzer Army in Hungary was reduced to the fact that it was possible to delay the start of the Soviet attack on Vienna for ten days. This, however, could no longer affect the course of the war lost by Germany.

According to official data, the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front in the second Battle of Balaton on March 6-15 lost 8.5 thousand killed and missing and 24.4 thousand wounded. Taking into account the usual underestimation of irretrievable losses by a factor of three, it can be assumed that the true losses in killed and missing reached 25 thousand people. The Germans captured 4.4 thousand prisoners. In addition, more than 2 thousand Bulgarians and more than one thousand Yugoslavs who fought on the Soviet side died in the second Battle of Balaton. There is no reliable data on German losses.



## The myth of the Vistula-Oder operation

One of the main myths of the Vistula-Oder operation is that, at the request of Roosevelt and Churchill, the start time of this operation was postponed from the originally scheduled January 20 to January 12, 1945, in order to help the Anglo-American troops who were in a difficult situation due to the offensive Wehrmacht in the Ardennes. But, as evidenced by the

documents and, in particular, the plan for the concentration of troops of the 1st Belorussian Front approved by Zhukov on December 29, 1944, the offensive was originally scheduled for January 8, 1945, but due to bad weather, which limited aviation operations and adjustment of artillery fire, it had to be rescheduled. In the same way, the 3rd Belorussian Front was supposed to launch an offensive on January 10, but it started on the 13th. The 1st Ukrainian Front went forward on

January 12 instead of the 9th, and the 2nd Belorussian Front on the 14th instead of January 10. Churchill's message, which reported that "very heavy fighting is going on in the West", and spoke of the "alarming situation when you have to defend a very wide front after a temporary loss of initiative", was sent only on January 6. It contained a request for information about Soviet military plans, but nothing more. Stalin, on the other hand, decided to pretend that the Red Army was ready to accelerate its upcoming offensive for the sake of the Allies, and on January 7 answered Churchill: "We are preparing for the offensive, but the weather is now not favorable for our offensive. However, given the position of our allies on the Western Front, the Headquarters of the Supreme High Command decided to finish the preparations at an accelerated pace and, regardless of the weather, open wide offensive operations against the Germans along the entire Central Front no later than the second half of January. In fact, the Soviet command was in a hurry to advance because it was too risky to keep large forces, including tank armies, inactive for several days on the bridgeheads across the Vistula. They were pulled up to bridgeheads with an orientation

even for the initial timing of the offensive - January 8-10. The enemy could detect the concentration of troops and inflict losses on them with the fire of his artillery, which was shooting through the bridgeheads. Therefore, the attack began when the forecasters gave a favorable weather forecast. Clear weather was promised on January 14, but they were mistaken. The good weather was established only on the 16th and lasted only a few days.

In fact, the plans for a general offensive by the Soviet fronts began to be developed as early as the end of November, and were finally approved by the Headquarters on December 22, that is, even before the messages to Stalin from Roosevelt and Churchill. And even then, the offensive in Poland and East Prussia was supposed to begin on January 8-10. Therefore, Stalin, knowing full well that the offensive should begin in the region of January 10-12, but not on the 20th, openly bluffed when he wrote to Churchill. But already on January 5, that is, before Stalin's answer to Churchill, shock groups of fronts, including tank armies, concentrated on the bridgeheads beyond the Vistula. To keep such a grouping for 15 days on relatively small bridgeheads, shot through by enemy artillery, was not only risky, but, most importantly, absolutely pointless. And the messages of Roosevelt and Churchill, sent to Stalin on December 24,

were by no means panicky. The leaders of England and the United States only wanted to know the plans of the Soviet command. Roosevelt said: "The situation in Belgium is not bad, but we have entered a period when we need to talk about the next phase." Churchill also wrote about the same: "I do not consider the situation in the West to be bad, but it is quite obvious that Eisenhower cannot solve his problem without knowing what your plans."

The Vistula-Oder operation was carried out by the 1st Belorussian Front of Marshal Zhukov and the 1st Ukrainian Front of Marshal Konev. Both fronts numbered 2,203.7 thousand people, 33.5 thousand guns and mortars, over 7 thousand tanks and self-propelled artillery installations, 5 thousand combat aircraft. The German troops of Army Group "A" of General Josef Harpe who opposed them numbered no more than 400 thousand people with 6 thousand guns, 1.2 thousand tanks and assault guns, and about 600 aircraft. They could not resist the overwhelming superiority of the Soviet troops.

Guderian stated in his memoirs: "We expected that the offensive would begin on January 12, 1945. The superiority of the Russians was expressed by the ratio: in infantry 11:1, in tanks 7:1, in artillery pieces 20:1. If we evaluate the enemy as a whole, then we could talk without any exaggeration about his 15-fold superiority on land and at least 20-fold superiority in the air. Guderian on December 25, 1944, during a meeting

with Hitler, tried to convince him to stop offensive operations on the Western Front in order to transfer divisions from there to the Eastern Front and create reserves to repel the expected Soviet offensive in Poland. However, Hitler not only did not return the divisions from the Western Front at that moment, but even transferred the 4th SS Panzer Corps, located north of Warsaw, to Hungary to try to unblock Budapest, which, of course, weakened the defense on the Vistula. By that time, the Fuhrer had already decided, in the event of the failure of the Ardennes offensive, to try to hold first of all the "Alpine fortress", where the last oil fields and refineries in Hungary and Austria remained. For the entire Eastern Front, the Wehrmacht had only 12.5 divisions in reserve. During the Vistula-Oder operation, it was planned to deliver two main strikes: from the Magnushevsky bridgehead by troops in the direction of Poznan and

from the Sandomierz bridgehead by the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front - to Breslau (Wroclaw). In addition, Zhukov's troops from the Pulawy bridgehead delivered an auxiliary strike in the general direction to Radom, Lodz. In itself, the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes contributed a lot to the success of the Soviet offensive on the Vistula, since the most combat-ready

German divisions, including tank divisions, were transferred to participate in the Ardennes offensive, and the Eastern Front was weakened. Already on the first day of the offensive, the German defenses on the Vistula were broken through. On January 17, Harpe was removed from his post and

replaced by General Scherner. The troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front advanced up to 100 km in four days.

On the 1st Belorussian Front, on January 16, the 69th Army and the 11th Tank Corps captured Radom by storm. Parts of the 2nd Guards Tank and 47th Armies and the 1st Army of the Polish Army liberated Warsaw on January 17, the garrison of which preferred to retreat so as not to be

surrounded. On January 19, units of the 3rd Guards Tank, 5th Guards and 52nd Armies approached Breslau, and the troops of the left wing of the 1st Ukrainian Front liberated Krakow. Under the threat of encirclement by the 3rd Guards Tank Army and the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, the German troops left Silesia, and Breslau was surrounded. In the period from January 23 to early February, the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front reached the Oder on a wide front. Having forced the river in the areas of Olau (Olav) and northwest of Oppeln (Opole), they captured and expanded the bridgehead on its western bank in the area of Steinau and

On January 19, troops of the 1st Belorussian Front liberated Lodz. On January 22, Zhukov's troops were already near Poznan, and after another 4 days they overcame the Mezeritsky fortified area on the move, which the enemy did not have time to occupy with sufficient forces. By February 3, the 1st Belorussian Front reached the Oder and captured a bridgehead on its western bank in the Kustrin area, clearing the right bank of the river from the enemy. Occupied by a strong German garrison, the Polish fortress of Poznan held out until February 13, 1945, when it was taken by the forces of the 8th Guards Army.

In the Vistula-Oder operation, Soviet troops, according to official figures, lost 43.5 thousand killed and missing and 150.7 thousand wounded and sick. Data on irretrievable losses, most likely, are underestimated by at least three times. There is no reliable data on the losses of German troops. It is only known that in the period from January 1 to January 20, 1945, the Red Army took 67,776 prisoners, most of whom were on the front of the Vistula-Oder operation, and a smaller part - in East Prussia.

## The myth of Auschwitz

The main myth of the Auschwitz concentration camp, discussions around which are still ongoing, is connected both with the calculation of the total number of prisoners who passed through the camp and died there, and with the question of whether gas chambers were used in Auschwitz

to kill people. Oswiecim (more correctly, the German name is Auschwitz, or Auschwitz-Birkenau, since the Polish name Auschwitz was not used during the German occupation) is the largest German concentration camp in Upper Silesia, founded on May 20, 1940 on the territory, after the occupation of Poland in September 1939 annexed to the territory of the Reich. Above the entrance to the camp hung the slogan "Arbeit macht frei" ("Work sets you free"). First, the Auschwitz-1 camp was created. The old two- and three-story Austrian barracks were used here. The 2,000 Polish population of Auschwitz was evicted. Only the Germans remained. The first 728 Polish political prisoners arrived at the camp on June 14, 1940. In 1941, there were from 13 to 16 thousand prisoners in Auschwitz-1, and at the beginning of 1942 - about 20 thousand. All of them were required to work six days a week (Sunday - day off). Various types of punishments were used - flogging, punishment cell, deprivation of food, execution. In the event of an escape, the hostages - the fugitive's neighbors in the barracks - were doomed to a slow starvation death. Since the autumn of 1941, Soviet prisoners of war began to enter Auschwitz, and since 1942, masses of Jews from Poland and Gypsies from other occupied territories and from Germany. There were also Polish and German political prisoners and criminals in the camp, as well as political prisoners from the countries occupied by the Germans. In total, people of more than 30 nationalities became victims of Auschwitz, but approximately 85% of the dead were Jews. Since October 1941, the Auschwitz-2 camp (Birkenau, in Polish Brzezinka) began to be built, where prisoners were accommodated in more than 300 one-story wooden barracks. In 1943-1944, the Auschwitz-2 camp doctor, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Josef Mengele, conducted m

twins. He also experimented with cold water survival thresholds to help Luftwaffe pilots who were shot down over the sea survive. Hundreds of prisoners became victims of Mengele's experiments. About 40 small camps

at the enterprises of the IG Farben concern are known under the name Auschwitz-3, for the needs of which the labor of prisoners was used. The first of these camps, Monowitz, was opened in May 1942. In Auschwitz,

there was an extremely high death rate of prisoners from epidemics of typhus and other diseases, as well as from malnutrition, especially in the last months of the camp's existence. In fact, it was an extermination camp, since the rations of the prisoners did not cover their labor costs, and they were doomed to a gradual death from malnutrition. In this way, Hitler was going to "finally solve the Jewish question." When on January 27, 1945, Soviet soldiers

occupied Auschwitz, they found only about 7.5 thousand disabled prisoners there. 58 thousand prisoners were evacuated to other concentration camps in Germany before the arrival of the Red Army.

The main discussion among historians revolves around whether gas chambers were used in Auschwitz using Zyklon B gas to exterminate people. As revisionist historians point out, with the concentration of people in the sealed chambers that the surviving witnesses spoke of, the unfortunate people would have died in about the same time without any poison gas from a lack of oxygen and an increase in carbon dioxide concentration. In addition, you would not have to spend time degassing the chambers. Gas "cyclone B" was used in Auschwitz, as in other German camps, to disinfect prisoners' clothing. At high temperatures, cyclone B granules emit hydrocyanic acid, which is deadly to humans and insects.

In 1947, a museum was created on the territory of Auschwitz, which is included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Initially, it was claimed that over 4 million people were killed in Auschwitz. Now the official death toll is 1.1 million. Revisionist historians claim that no more than 510 thousand people were killed in Auschwitz, taking into account

capacity and real time of functioning of the crematoriums available in the camp. Sometimes a lower figure of 200,000 dead is also given, which roughly corresponds to the number of registered deaths in Auschwitz.

## **The myth of the German "wonder weapon"**

The main myth of the German "miracle weapon" was created by Nazi propaganda during the Second World War, especially in 1943-1945, when the hopes for a German victory and even for a somewhat favorable outcome of the war for the German side were fading every month. It consisted in the assertion that with the advent of the "wonder weapon" in the war there should be a radical turn in favor of Germany. In the post-war historiography of various countries, as well as in journalism, allegations were widespread that Hitler did not have enough of a year or even six months to get his hands on a real "miracle weapon" that would bring him victory.

The category of German "wonder weapons" usually includes the German nuclear project, V-1 and V-2 missiles, as well as German submarines of the latest modification. Sometimes the "miracle weapon" also includes the "tiger" and "royal tiger" tanks and German jet aircraft, primarily the Me-262 fighter.

It has long been proven that the German atomic project by the end of the war was still very far from completion. German physicists tried to carry out a self-sustaining chain reaction only in March 1945, but failed. And even if successful, at least two and a half years would have passed from the moment the chain reaction was carried out to the creation of the bomb. This is exactly what happened to the Americans. Enrico Fermi was able to carry out the first nuclear chain reaction in a reactor in California on December 2, 1942, and the first tests of the American atomic bomb were carried out only on July 16, 1945. The German nuclear project, on the other hand, was hampered from the middle of 1943 due to the strategic bombing of the Anglo-American aviation. The Germans had to disperse production in small towns, hide it in the mountains and underground, which cost a lot of effort and money. The same factor had a negative impact on other projects to create "wonder weapons". In particular, the bombings delayed the appearance of Project XXI submarines for six months, which were almost invulnerable to anti-submarine defenses, and in March 1945, due to the bombings, their assembly had to be stopped.



As a result, they went on their first military campaigns in early May 1945, when everything was already over. In the case of the nuclear project, there were two more factors that caused it to lag behind the American one. German scientists, led by Nobel laureate Werner Heisenberg, believed that only heavy water could serve as a neutron moderator, and realized too late that graphite could be used in the same capacity. In addition, German physicists, taking into account the limited uranium reserves at their disposal, sought to carry out a chain reaction with a minimum critical mass, which required an increase in pressure and complicated the project. In fact, only the implementation of the atomic project before the countries of the

Anti-Hitler coalition could turn the tide of the war in favor of Germany. All other "wonder weapon" projects could not provide such a breakthrough even with the most successful implementation of these projects. The V-1 cruise missile and the V-2 ballistic missile were able to reach England from the coast of France and Belgium, more or less successfully overcoming British air defenses. However, the missile could deliver no more than a ton of explosives to the target, i.e. even less than the American Flying Fortress, which could lift 3-3.5 tons of bombs. No more than 31% of the V-1 and V-2 reached the target. A total of 32,000 V-1 and 6,600 V-2 missiles were produced, of which 18,000 V-1 and 3,225 V-2 missiles were fired at targets in the UK and other parts of Europe, with which about 12,000 civilians were killed. population. It was not possible to hit any important military targets, since the missiles were unguided. At the same time, the average cost of the V-1 rocket was about 100 thousand Reichsmarks, and the V-2 - 250 thousand Reichsmarks. One V-2 cost as much as two Me-109 fighters, while its real combat effectiveness was much lower than the effectiveness of even one fighter. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the Germans lost the Second World War, among other things, because they had the most advanced scientific and

technical thought. They were, perhaps, the only participants who, already during the war, were intensively introducing fundamentally new types of weapons and military equipment into mass production, be it "tigers" and "panthers", be it the latest "Focke-

wolfs" and Me-262 jet fighters or V-missiles. All these innovations were many times more expensive than their earlier counterparts, but by no means as many times more effective. True, here it is necessary to make a reservation that the "Focke-Wulfs" were used against "flying fortresses", against which their heavy weapons were more effective. Instead of wasting energy and money on the latest "toys", perhaps it was worth increasing the production of old models, only modernizing them? For example, the same Me-109 and T IV? After all, the Tiger tank cost about 800 thousand Reichsmarks, and the modernized T IV - no more than 125 thousand Reichsmarks. This means that instead of one "tiger" it was possible to produce at least six modernized T IVs. Then, perhaps, it would be possible, if not to eliminate, then to significantly reduce the numerical superiority of the Allies in armaments and military equipment. Moreover, the modernized T IV with a long-barreled gun was superior in practice, taking into account the superiority of German tankers in skill, the Soviet T-34. And in the West, tanks that would have surpassed the modernized T IV did not appear until the end of the war. The American Sherman could only fight him on an equal footing, yielding to both the Panthers and the Tigers. In the Soviet Union, the modernized T-34 with an 85 mm gun first came to the front in March 1944. It was superior to the modernized T-34, could fight on equal terms with the "panthers" and was inferior to the "tigers" and "royal tigers". However, it can be reasonably assumed that if the Germans had not had "tigers" and "panthers", Soviet designers would not have received an assignment to develop the T-34-85 until the end of the war. But under the conditions of a totalitarian regime, the main task was to develop and produce the necessary weapons and military equipment, and the question of its price faded into the background. Designers got the opportunity to implement their most daring designs. And this happened even before the superiority of the Allies on all fronts forced Hitler to seek salvation in search of a "miracle weapon" that could radically change the course of the war that was unfavorably developing for Germany. For example, the terms of reference for the development of the future "royal tiger" was issued back in August 1942, when the Wehrmacht was at the peak of its success. The designers came up with the idea to place in the tower

tank 88-mm anti-aircraft gun, and a new heavy tank was created for this gun. The King Tiger outperformed all World War II tanks, including the Soviet IS-2 heavy tank with a 122mm turret gun. But for the first time, the "Royal Tigers" entered the battle only in August 1944, when the German troops mostly retreated. And it was very difficult to evacuate even a slightly damaged "royal tiger". It could only be towed by another "royal tiger". In addition, not every bridge could withstand the weight of the "royal tiger". All this increased the German irretrievable losses in the latest armored vehicles.

## **The myth of the storming of Königsberg**

The main myth of the assault on Königsberg in April 1945 is the assertion of Soviet wartime and post-war propaganda that it was a powerful fortress with a strong garrison and its capture in four days was an outstanding achievement of the military art of the Red Army. In fact, the capture of Königsberg

and East Prussia was carried out only thanks to the overwhelming numerical and technical superiority of the Red Army and cost it heavy losses. The operation to capture East Prussia began on January 13, 1945. The 3rd Belorussian Front of General Ivan Chernyakhovsky, the 43rd Army of the 1st Baltic Front of General Ivan Bagramyan and the 2nd Belorussian Front of Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky took part in it. They numbered 1669 thousand people, 25.4 thousand guns and mortars, about 4 thousand tanks and self-propelled artillery installations and 3.1 thousand combat aircraft. In East Prussia and Northern Poland, they were opposed by the troops of Army Group Center under the command of General Hans Georg Reinhardt. The army group, according to Soviet intelligence estimates, significantly overestimated, had 580 thousand soldiers and officers, more than 8 thousand guns and mortars, 515 combat aircraft. The advance of Soviet troops in East Prussia was hampered by the presence of powerful long-term fortifications there, created back in the interwar period. Initially, the 2nd Belorussian Front was supposed to operate with its main forces in

Pomerania. However, on January 20, due to the slow advance of the 3rd Belorussian Front, the Headquarters ordered the 3rd, 48th, 2nd shock and 3rd Guards Tank Armies to turn to action against the East Prussian grouping. The front commander, Marshal Rokossovsky, criticized this decision in his memoirs, since it led

four armies away from the main, Berlin, direction to a secondary, East Prussian one. Probably, the turn of the main forces of the 2nd Belorussian Front against East Prussia was explained by the fact that Stalin sought

to annex this province and wanted to occupy it before the end of the war in order to present the allies with a fait accompli.

On January 26, tankmen of the 5th Guards Tank Army of General Volsky reached the Baltic Sea north of Elbing. Then the troops of the 48th Army and the 2nd Shock Army entered the area of Marienburg and Elbing. On the night of January 27, three German infantry divisions launched an unexpected counterattack and pushed the 48th Army 10-20 km away, defeating two Soviet rifle divisions. By January 30, the Germans were 10 km from Elbing. There was a threat of restoring the land connection of East Prussia with the rest of Germany. Chernyakhovsky urgently transferred a rifle, mechanized and two tank corps, a cavalry corps, five anti-tank artillery brigades, a rifle division and other units to the breakthrough area.

On January 29, German troops in East Prussia were divided into Heilsberg, Königsberg and Zemland groups. But already on January 30, the Panzer Division "Grossdeutschland" and the motorized division "Hermann Goering" pushed the 11th Guards Army from the coast and restored contact with Königsberg. On January 31, Soviet troops captured Heilsberg, but the further offensive had to be stopped due to fierce enemy resistance. On February 10, Soviet troops launched an offensive against the Heilsberg and

Zemland groups. On February 18, General Chernyakhovsky died, and Marshal Vasilevsky replaced him at the head of the 3rd Belorussian Front. On February 19-20, the Germans launched a counterattack, captured the Metgeten position and restored Königsberg's connection with the Zemland group. By March 29, the group defending the Heilsberg fortified area

was destroyed. Its remnants were able to break into Königsberg. On January 30, Königsberg was surrounded by the forces of the 39th and 11th

Guards armies. But on February 19-20, the Germans managed to unblock the city with a blow from the north-west, breaking through the positions of the 39th Army. Now it is possible to supply the capital of East Prussia through the port of Pillau.

The assault on Königsberg began on April 6. It was carried out by the 43rd, 50th and 11th Guards Armies under the general leadership of General Baghramyan. They numbered 137 thousand people, 5 thousand guns and mortars, 538 tanks and self-propelled guns, 2444 aircraft.

In Königsberg, the Germans had three defense rings. As the commandant of Königsberg Otto von Lyash recalled, "the brick used for construction was fired several times, which increased strength. Thus, these old fortifications were quite reliable protection, including against modern artillery. However, their disadvantage was that the ability to observe from there and fire was very limited. The two most combat-ready divisions of the Königsberg garrison, infantry and tank, as well as a significant part of the artillery stocks, were withdrawn to the Zemland Peninsula long before the assault. According to the commandant of Königsberg, General Otto von Lyash, by the beginning of the assault, there were 35 thousand defenders for 150 thousand attackers, in addition to which there were about 15 thousand members of the Volkssturm who did not have weapons. Of the armored vehicles, the garrison had only one company of assault guns. This was due to the fact that the commander of the 4th Army and the Zemland group of troops, General Friedrich Wilhelm Muller, was going to defend Pillau in the first place, through which troops and refugees were evacuated to Germany. He did not assume that the Soviet troops would storm Königsberg, believing this action was pointless. German observers saw how Soviet troops were regrouping before the assault, but the Königsberg garrison could not prevent it due to an acute shortage of shells. Also, the Germans could not, on the eve of enemy artillery preparation, withdraw troops from the advanced lines of the trenches in advance. There was simply nowhere to take them away, since Soviet artillery shot through the entire territory occupied at that moment by the Königsberg group.

The assault began with a powerful artillery preparation, then, at noon, under the cover of a barrage, infantry, tanks and self-propelled guns went on the offensive. The fortifications were blocked and destroyed by Soviet assault groups with the help of tanks, 122-mm guns and flamethrowers. This is how the assault on the city was remembered by General Lyash: "Our fortress artillery, weak and poor in shells, could not oppose anything to this fire and not a single German fighter

showed up in the sky. Anti-aircraft batteries were powerless against a cloud of enemy aircraft, and besides, they had difficulty defending themselves from enemy tanks. All means of communication were immediately destroyed, and only foot messengers made their way through the heaps of ruins to their command posts or positions. Under a hail of shells, soldiers and residents of the city huddled in the cellars of houses, crowding there in terrible crowding. On April 8, Königsberg was completely surrounded. The remnants of the garrison tried to break

through to the west along with crowds of refugees on the evening of April 8, but failed. Only a few assault guns and separate units, numbering

several hundred people.

On the night of April 10, the commandant of Königsberg, General Otto Lyash, capitulated on terms that guaranteed the lives of soldiers and civilians and decent treatment in captivity. On April 10, the last pockets of resistance were eliminated.

Here are the recollections of one of the German officers about the pictures that he saw immediately after the surrender, when the prisoners were driven to the assembly point: "Weeping, struggling girls and women were dragged into the houses ... Roadside cuvettes were full of corpses ... There were many dead children lying around. Hanged men dangled on the trees - with their ears cut off, their eyes gouged out ... Farms were burning, household belongings were lying on the road, cattle were running around, they shot at them, killing them indiscriminately. We heard the cries of those crying for help."

On April 25, Pillau was taken. Remains of German troops retreating on the Frische Nerung Spit, surrendered on May 9, as part of a general surrender.

According to official Soviet data, the losses of the Red Army in the battles for East Prussia in the period from January 13 to April 25, 1945 amounted to 126.5 thousand killed and missing and 458.3 thousand wounded and sick. True irretrievable losses were several times greater. Soviet troops lost 3,525 tanks and self-propelled artillery mounts, 1,644 guns and mortars, and 1,450 combat aircraft. There is no reliable data on the losses of the Wehrmacht in the battles for East Prussia.

## The myth of the Berlin operation

The main myth of the Berlin operation is the assertion that the Red Army could not take Berlin in any way back in February 1945, immediately after the completion of the Vistula-Oder operation, and that the Stavka was absolutely right when it postponed the attack on Berlin and preferred to first destroy the grouping of German troops in Eastern Pomerania. The

possibility of the capture of Berlin by Soviet troops existed immediately after the completion of the Vistula-Oder operation. The former commander of the 8th Guards Army, Marshal Vasily Chuikov, in his post-war memoirs, claimed that Berlin could have been taken as early as February. Other marshals, especially Zhukov, denied this possibility in their memoirs.

Chuikov claimed that the attack on Berlin was canceled during Zhukov's meeting with the army commanders on February 4, 1945. Stalin called and unexpectedly for Zhukov demanded to stop planning the Berlin operation and start planning an operation against German troops in Eastern Pomerania. If there was such a meeting, it was only after 10 February. It was on this day that the plan of the Berlin offensive operation of the 1st Belorussian Front, reported by Zhukov to Stalin, was marked. The marshal claimed that the enemy was "hurriedly transferring the 6th SS Panzer Army from the Western Front to the Berlin direction, with a total strength of up to six tank and up to six infantry divisions," and suggested "disrupting the enemy's operational concentration, breaking through his defenses on the western bank of the Oder River and seizing Berlin." In general, this

was the same plan that the 1st Belorussian Front implemented in April, when Stalin finally gave the go-ahead for an attack on Berlin. The capital of the Reich was supposed to cover from the northwest and southwest, and then destroy the encircled grouping with concentric strikes from all directions. To repel a possible counterattack from Pomerania, Zhukov left three armies, reinforced by three corps. In conclusion, he noted that the troops would be ready to launch an offensive on Berlin on February 19–20. That,



what Zhukov suggested was the optimal solution. East of Berlin, the Germans had almost no troops. With the transfer of formations from the Western Front, they were hopelessly late and could not concentrate them on the Oder by the time the planned offensive of the 1st Belorussian Front began, especially since the 6th SS Panzer Army was heading to Hungary. The grouping of German troops in Pomerania was significantly inferior in terms of forces and means to the armies of the 1st and 2nd Belorussian fronts opposing it.

But just on February 10, when Zhukov presented the plan for the Berlin operation, and Rokossovsky launched an offensive in Eastern Pomerania, Stalin actually refused to immediately take Berlin, redirecting the main forces of the 2nd Belorussian Front to East Prussia, and moving against the East Pomeranian group, in turn, part of the forces of the 1st Belorussian Front. But even after the turn of the four armies of Rokossovsky against the East Prussian grouping, the German troops in Pomerania were not able to allocate enough forces for a deep strike on the rear of the 1st Belorussian Front. Nevertheless, the plan for the attack

on Berlin was approved by Stalin, since already on February 13, Zhukov gave directives to his armies to conduct the Berlin operation. The army offensive plans were to be ready by February 17, but the exact time for going on the offensive was not set. The tasks for the armies were scheduled for the first four days of the operation. After that, it was supposed to start the assault on Berlin. However, after the start of the German counter-offensive in Pomerania on February 16, Stalin turned a significant part of the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front against the enemy's Pomeranian grouping. It consisted of only 4 tank and 2 infantry divisions, while Zhukov had four tank armies alone. In addition, sooner or later, the divisions of the group that had released the encircled garrison of Arnswalde would have to turn against the 2nd Belorussian Front, which was advancing in Eastern Pomerania. There was no real threat of a German breakthrough to the rear of the 1st Belorussian Front. As early as February 19, both Zhukov and Headquarters were confident that the armies of the 1st Belorussian Front could continue their march to the Oder and further to Berlin. And only on February 22, the Headquarters decided not to

later on March 1, turn the main forces of the right wing of the 1st Belorussian Front against the East Pomeranian grouping, temporarily abandoning the attack on Berlin. This decision was justified not by the situation in Pomerania, but by the threat of the transfer of new German forces there both from Courland and from the Western Front. It is possible that Stalin was worried about the 6th SS Panzer Army, which at that time was being transferred to the Eastern Front. But by that time she had already attacked the Gronskey bridgehead, and it was difficult to expect her appearance in Pomerania or

near Berlin. Most likely, Stalin feared that the Allies would land troops in Pomerania and East Prussia in order to accept the surrender of German troops there. Just on February 8-10, the Allied offensive to the Rhine began and successfully developed, culminating in the encirclement of the main German forces on the Western Front. Stalin, not without reason, feared that the Germans would surrender to the British and Americans, who signed the Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War, much more willingly than to the Soviet troops, who were not bound by any conventions and often sinned by reprisals against prisoners of war. Therefore, he was in a hurry to occupy East Prussia, and Pomerania, and even Courland, although in fact the Allies did not even have plans to occupy these territories. Stalin could be particularly worried about the possible landing of the allies in Pomerania, if the Germans were able to hold out there until the moment of general surrender. After all, this territory, according to the agreement reached in Yalta, was to be transferred to Poland. It is possible that he feared the landing there not only of Anglo-American troops, but also of the Polish emigrant government with its army and the creation of a real dual power in Poland.

Until the last moment, Hitler was not going to defend Berlin, which is why a rather weak group was concentrated there. The Fuhrer planned to move to the Alpine Fortress, where part of the government had already been evacuated. There he hoped to hold out as long as possible, in the hope that Stalin and the Western allies would quarrel with each other. Therefore, on the Soviet German front, the strongest was the Army Group Center operating in Czechoslovakia, which numbered a million soldiers and officers and was supposed to hold the vital

"Alpine fortress" industrial areas. But the capture of Vienna by Soviet troops and the invasion of American troops into Bavaria convinced Hitler that there was no chance of sitting out in the Alpine Fortress. Therefore, already after the start of the Soviet offensive on Berlin, on April 21, Hitler decided to stay there to die in the capital of the Reich, and not in some obscure Alpine village. He spoke about this on the eve of his suicide to the commandant of Berlin, General Helmut Weidling. Although he could have left Berlin on April 28, when the last plane with the new commander-in-chief of the Luftwaffe, Field Marshal Robert von Greim, took off from the city.

The attack on Berlin of the 1st Belorussian Front of Zhukov and the 1st Ukrainian Front of Konev began on April 16, and the 2nd Belorussian Front of Rokossovsky on April 20, since the latter needed more time to transfer troops from Pomerania and prepare to force the Oder in its lower reaches. On the German side, the Vistula Army Group under the command of General Gotthard Heinrici, who was replaced by General Kurt Student on April 28, operated in the Berlin direction. It included the 9th Army and the General's 3rd Tank Army. On April 24, the main forces (5 divisions) of the 12th Army were additionally introduced into the battle, and the 11th Army was detached from the 3rd Tank Army. In addition, a part of the 4th Panzer Army of General Franz Gresser acted against the 1st Ukrainian Front from Field Marshal Ferdinand Scherner's Army Group Center. In the Berlin operation, three Soviet fronts, numbering more

than 2,062 thousand soldiers and officers, were opposed, even taking into account the hastily formed 12th Army of General of the Panzer Troops Walter Wenck, who had been hastily transferred to Berlin already during the battle, only about 500 thousand soldiers and officers. The Soviet troops had 6,250 tanks and over 7,500 aircraft. The German troops, even according to the Soviet, greatly inflated estimate, had 1.5 thousand tanks and 3.3 thousand aircraft. Given the severe shortage of fuel, only a few hundred Luftwaffe aircraft were combat-ready at that moment.

Stalin drew a dividing line in the city of Lubben, 60 km southeast of Berlin, thus provoking a race between Zhukov and Konev - who would be the first to break into the capital of the Reich. To start the offensive before dawn, Zhukov decided to light

battlefield with 143 powerful anti-aircraft searchlights. He hoped not only to give his troops the opportunity to navigate in the dark, but also to blind the enemy. But, as Marshal of Artillery Konstantin Kazakov testifies, "at the end of the artillery preparation ... at the set signal, searchlights were turned on, the bright rays of which were directed at the enemy. But, according to witnesses (reporting documents also say the same), the enemy was not blinded. Even very strong searchlight beams could not penetrate the predawn fog and dense clouds of dust and smoke raised by the explosions of many tens of thousands of shells and mines. But the searchlights did a great service to our troops ... They illuminated the path for the infantry and tanks, without which their offensive in the dark would be extremely difficult and could lead to

severe consequences."

But the searchlights also served the enemy artillery observers no less, illuminating the battle formations of the attackers and allowing them to more accurately adjust the fire. In an article in

Pravda in November 1957, which appeared in connection with the resignation of Zhukov, Konev quite rightly noted that the command and headquarters of the 1st Belorussian Front "underestimated the available data on the deliberate withdrawal of enemy troops to the Seelow Heights, located at 6–8 km from the front line. As a result, powerful artillery and aviation preparation actually fell on empty space. Zhukov got stuck on the Seelow Heights for three days. The marshal demanded "tankmen, self-

propelled gunners and infantry not to wait until the artillery kills all the Germans and gives them the pleasure of moving through the clear space." Such orders only increased the losses. His troops suffered heavy losses. And Konev already on the first day of the offensive broke through the enemy defenses. Due to Zhukov's delay at the Seelow Heights, Stalin allowed Konev to advance directly on Berlin with the 3rd and 4th Guards Tank Armies and the 28th Combined Arms Army. This caused Zhukov's displeasure. The Soviet marshals inflated the size of the Berlin garrison by four times, claiming that it numbered 200 thousand people. In fact, its number did not exceed 50 thousand people, and its

the basis was the soldiers of the 56th Panzer Corps, who had already suffered heavy losses, who had retreated from the Seelow Heights. In Berlin, the 56th Panzer Corps of General Weidling, appointed commandant of Berlin, was reinforced by scattered rear units and Volkssturm troops armed with captured weapons of various sizes, for which there was very little ammunition. There was also not enough ammunition for German armaments, since the German military industry was already largely paralyzed or captured by the Red Army and the Allies. On April 24, General Wenck's 9th

Army launched its first tank attacks against the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps from the 4th Guards Tank Army and units of the 13th Army. She managed to connect with the Potsdam garrison that had broken through from the encirclement. But Wenck soon realized that it was impossible to break through to Berlin, and concentrated his main efforts on releasing the German 9th Army, which was surrounded southeast of Berlin, which he managed to do. Up to 40 thousand soldiers and officers of this army, led by General Busse, joined the 12th Army and surrendered along with it to American troops. On April 30, Hitler,

realizing the hopelessness of the situation, shot himself in the bunker of the Reich Chancellery, and his body, along with the body of his wife Eva Braun, was burned. Before his death, Hitler appointed as his successor as Reich President and Supreme Commander Karl Admiral Commander-in-Chief of all German forces in northern Germany. On May 2, on the day of the surrender of Berlin, separate groups of German troops, together with the functionaries of the National Socialist Party, tried to break through to the north to Dönitz, but almost no one succeeded. During the breakthrough, Hitler's deputy Reichsleiter Martin Bormann committed suicide by taking poison. Of the high-ranking Nazi leaders, only the head of the Hitler Youth, Arthur Axman, was able to get to Dönitz's headquarters from Berlin.

In total, according to the Soviet command, up to 17 thousand people managed to escape from Berlin with 80–90 armored vehicles. However, few people managed to get to the German positions in the north, since their further path lay through the dense battle formations of the Soviet troops and under the continuous influence of Soviet aircraft.

North of Berlin, the command of the Vistula Army Group ignored Hitler's orders to hold on at all costs and break through to Berlin. They sought to reach the line of British troops as soon as possible in order to surrender to them. On May 4, the German troops stationed in Northwest Germany, Denmark and Holland, including the remnants of the Vistula Army Group, capitulated to the Army Group of British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery. According to official Soviet (Russian)

data, first made public in 1993 in the collection "Secrecy Removed", in the Berlin operation, Soviet troops lost 81.1 thousand killed and 280.3 thousand wounded and sick. But the fact that the official irretrievable losses of the Soviet troops during the Berlin operation were underestimated by almost 4 times is proved by the following example. Irretrievable losses during this operation are determined at 81,116 people, including the losses of the 1st and 2nd armies of the Polish Army. At the same time, the irretrievable losses of the two Polish armies, according to the official publication of the Russian Ministry of Defense, amounted to only 2825 people. However, the official data of the Polish Ministry of Defense, released in 2005, indicate that the irretrievable losses of the two Polish armies in the Berlin operation amounted to 7.2 thousand dead and 3.8 thousand missing, which gives an irretrievable loss of 11 thousand people, i.e., 3.9 times more than official Soviet sources give. It can be assumed that the irretrievable losses of the rest of the troops participating in the Berlin operation are underestimated in the same proportion. Then they should be about 316.4 thousand people, which probably exceeds the irretrievable losses of the German troops that opposed the Soviet troops in the Berlin operation. After all, the main part of this group (at least 300 thousand people) surrendered to the British and Americans. Its losses in dead and prisoners in the battles with the Red Army can be estimated at 200 thousand people, while Zhukov claimed that the Germans lost 300 thousand prisoners and 150 thousand killed. The total losses of the three Soviet fronts and two armies of the Polish Army (both irretrievable and wounded and sick) can be estimated at 597 thousand people.

An analysis of the data from the collection "The Classification Removed" shows that the Berlin operation turned out to be seriously underestimated

irretrievable losses of the 1st Ukrainian Front. According to the collection, the troops of the front by the beginning of the operation on April 16, 1945, numbered 550,900 people and consisted of 44 rifle and three cavalry divisions, as well as 4 mechanized and 5 tank corps, two separate tank brigades and three self-propelled artillery brigades. At the same time, it is indicated that the 3rd and 5th guards, 13th and 52nd combined arms and 3rd and 4th guards tank armies, as well as the 2nd air army.

Meanwhile, from the book "The Last Assault", published in 1975, it follows that 44 rifle divisions that participated in the Berlin operation were part of the 1st Ukrainian Front, only taking into account nine divisions of the 28th Army, which was transferred to the front April 20, 1945, that is, after the start of the Berlin operation. In addition, the authors of "Grif" for some reason forgot to count one airborne division as part of the 5th Guards Army. To complete the picture, we also note that the authors of the collection "Secrecy Removed" underestimated the number of rifle divisions on the 2nd Belorussian Front by three, showing only 33 divisions there and indicating that the 19th and 5th Guards Tank Armies did not participate in the operation. . In fact, one of the rifle corps of the 19th Army nevertheless participated in the Berlin operation, which increases the number of rifle divisions at Rokossovsky to 36. In addition, he actually had two, and not one separate tank brigade, as shown in "Grief". It can be assumed that the number of troops of

the 1st Ukrainian Front as of April 16, 1945 is given correctly in the collection "Secret Classification Removed" and this number also includes the 9th Guards Airborne Division, which they did not show. Note that, taking into account the underestimation of nine rifle divisions at Konev and three rifle divisions and one tank brigade at Rokossovsky, the total number of Soviet troops participating in the Berlin operation is underestimated by 135 thousand. In reality, it probably amounted to 2040 thousand people. people, and taking into account the two armies of the Polish Army - up to 2.2 million people.

By the beginning of the Prague offensive operation on May 6, the grouping of the 1st Ukrainian Front increased to 71 rifle divisions, 3

cavalry divisions, 4 mechanized and 5 tank corps, three separate tank and three self-propelled artillery brigades. Obviously, there was also one airborne division, missed by the authors of the "Vulture". Let's try to estimate what would have been the size of the grouping of the 1st Ukrainian Front at the beginning of the Prague operation, if not for the losses in the Berlin operation, which ended for the troops of the front immediately before the start of the front. At the same time, it should be taken into account that the strength of an airborne division was approximately equal to the strength of a rifle division, and the strength of one cavalry division was about a third of the strength of a rifle division. In the same way, tank and motorized rifle corps were each approximately equal in size to a rifle division. And two separate tank brigades and three self-propelled artillery brigades, taken together, were approximately equal in size to one rifle division. Then the total strength of the grouping of the 1st Ukrainian Front before the beginning of the Berlin operation, without nine divisions of the 28th Army, can be estimated at about 47 calculated rifle divisions, and the strength of the grouping of the same front by the beginning of the Prague operation - at 83.2 calculated rifle divisions. Taking into account the number of troops of the 1st Ukrainian by the beginning of the Berlin operation, the number of front troops involved in the Prague operation can be estimated at 975.2 thousand people, while in reality it amounted to 806.4 thousand people. The losses of the 1st Ukrainian Front in the Berlin operation, according to the collection "Secrecy Removed", amounted to 86,245 wounded and sick and 27,580 killed and missing. If you subtract them from 975.2 thousand people, you get 861.4 thousand people. This is 55,000 more people than actually remained in the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front by the beginning of the Prague operation. 55 thousand is the approximate amount of underestimated irretrievable losses, without taking into account possible replenishments received by the troops of the front by the beginning of the Prague operation. Then the total irretrievable losses of the front in the Berlin operation can be estimated at 82.6 thousand people, which is 3 times more than the figure given by the authors of Grif. However, to estimate the total amount of irretrievable losses of all Soviet troops in the Berlin operation, we consider it more appropriate to use a coefficient of 3.9, obtained on the example of the Polish armies. In-



First, in the case of the Poles, we are dealing directly with data on deadweight losses. Secondly, there is a high probability that the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front, which suffered heavy losses in the Berlin operation, received reinforcements before the Prague operation. Moreover, during the Berlin operation, many prisoners of war and "ostarbeiters" of military age were released. It should be said that the troops of the 1st Belorussian Front, already after the start of the Berlin operation, on April 20 and 30, received a centralized replenishment with a total number of 16,900 people. Most likely, the 1st Ukrainian Front also received a replenishment close in size during the Berlin operation. For example, the 7th Guards Mechanized Corps, which was part of the front, was withdrawn from the battle on April 30, before the start of the Prague operation, received replenishment with people and equipment. And the 3rd Guards Army only in the period from April 20 to April 30 received a replenishment of 6,600 people. In addition, it cannot be ruled out that on the 1st Belorussian Front, which suffered the heaviest losses, the coefficient of underestimation of losses was even greater than on the 1st Ukrainian Front.

Even before the Berlin operation, in the period from February 1 to May 20, 1945, more than 40 thousand replenishment people from among "Soviet citizens of military age released from German captivity" were poured into the troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front. At the same time, it was the "Ostarbeiters" that prevailed among the liberated, and not the former prisoners of war. So, as reported on April 7, 1945, the head of the political department of the 1st Ukrainian Front, Major General F.V. 13th Army. - **B.S. ),** 873 former military personnel, 2997 people newly drafted into the army, including 784 women. Thus, the proportion of former prisoners of war among the new conscription was only no more than 23%. And the fact that 20% of the conscripts were women from the "Ostarbeiters" proved that the human resources of the Red Army were close to exhaustion. Women were sent to the rear units to release "active bayonets" from there for the last battles.

## The myth of "Wilhelm Gustloff"

The myth of the sinking of the largest German liner "Wilhelm Gustloff" by the Soviet submarine S-13 captain Alexander Ivanovich Marinesko is that this victory was almost of strategic importance, since the color of German submariners went to the bottom of the Baltic along with the liner. Hitler allegedly declared Marinesko his personal enemy and staged state mourning for the dead. On January 21, 1945, the Commander-in-

Chief of the German Navy, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, ordered Operation Hannibal to be carried out - the evacuation of troops and population from Pomerania, East Prussia and Courland by sea. Until the end of the war, 2.5 million civilians were transported. The German liner Wilhelm Gustloff was sunk by the Soviet submarine S-13 on January 30, 1945. Of the 918 sailors and officers of the 2nd training division of the submarine forces aboard the Gustloff, 406 people died, out of 173 crew members - 90 people, out of 373 women of the auxiliary service of the German fleet - 250, out of about 5000 refugees and 162 wounded - 4600 people. In total, out of about 6.6 thousand people on board the liner, about 5.4 thousand died and 1239 people were saved. The death of 406 cadets, who were still far from completing their course of study, could in no way affect the course of the submarine war. During the war years, Gustloff served as a barracks for the 2nd Diving Training Division. Hence the legend was born that more than a thousand submarine instructors, the color of the German submarine fleet, sank along with the Gustloff. The Soviet version claimed that there were 3,700 officers on board the ship, crews for 70-80 submarines, and the girls from the auxiliary service of the fleet turned into SS guards of concentration camps. The Wilhelm Gustloff liner, the pride of the German merchant fleet, was named after the Fuhrer of the Nazi Party in Switzerland, Wilhelm

Gustloff, who was killed on February 4, 1936 in Davos by Jewish medical student David Frankfurter, who was avenging

persecution of Jews by the Nazis. Gustloff's funeral was turned into an all-German propaganda event. Hitler declared a nationwide three-week mourning in connection with the assassination of Gustloff. Hence the legend invented by Soviet propaganda was born that the Fuhrer declared mourning in connection with the sinking of the Gustloff. In fact, there was nothing of the sort. These days, under the onslaught of the Red Army, German troops rolled back to the Oder, Soviet tanks threatened Berlin. Hitler had better things to do than mourn the Gustloff. Equally unreliable is the propaganda claim that Hitler declared Alexander Marinesco his personal enemy. There was nothing of the kind in reality. The Fuhrer did not even know the name of the commander of the submarine that torpedoed the Gustloff. Gustloff, launched in 1937, had a displacement of 25 thousand tons, a

length of 208 m. Its construction cost 25 million marks. It could take 1.5 thousand passengers and was transferred to the organization of the Labor Front "Strength through Joy" for cruises.

The torpedo "attack of the century" could only take place thanks to a random combination of a number of favorable circumstances. On October 8, 1943, during a raid by American bombers on Gottenhafen (Gdynia), Gustloff received a one and a half meter crack in the side skin, which was hastily welded. Before going to sea, the captain of the Gustloff, 63-year-old Friedrich Petersen, who had not gone to sea for many years, was given the help of two young captains and an experienced submariner, the corvette of Captain Tsang. Thus, at the fateful moment, four captains gathered on the bridge of the Gustloff at once, which clearly made it difficult to make the right decisions and contributed to the death of the ship. Tsang suggested sailing at a maximum speed of 16 knots and zigzagging, which ensured that the slower-moving Soviet submarines could not overtake the liner. However, Petersen, fearing for the strength of the weld, insisted that the ship move at a speed of no more than 12 knots and without maneuvering (there was not enough fuel for this), which made it easy prey for the Marinesco submarine. At seven o'clock in the evening, when the Gustloff, walking along the corridor in the minefields, received a radiogram that there was a connection on the opposite course

German minesweepers. On the other hand, the warning about the presence of the Stolpe C-13 bank in the area, transmitted by the headquarters of the security forces of the Gotenhafen base, was not received on the ships of the convoy due to atmospheric interference. On the Gustloff, identification lights were turned on to avoid a collision. In fact, there were no minesweepers nearby, they had passed earlier, and it was never found out who sent the ill-fated radiogram. The lights burned for half an hour, and this time was enough for Marinesco to find the target. He made the attack on the surface. Gustloff was accompanied by only one torpedo boat, which at first after the disaster was busy rescuing people, and when it started throwing depth charges, the Soviet boat had already left the Danzig Bay. About an hour after the attack, the Wilhelm Gustloff, which was hit by three torpedoes, completely sank. Contrary to the Soviet myth that

prevailed in the 1960s, not one of the four captains of the Gustloff, as well as the commander of the escort boat, was shot on Hitler's orders. All the captains escaped and survived until the end of the war. Only the youngest of them, Koller, committed suicide shortly after the surrender of Germany. The head of the submarine school also survived. It is characteristic that he, along with his family, preferred to leave on a minesweeper, since he did not believe that the Gustloff voyage would end safely. On the way back, on February

10, 1945, S-13 sank the General Steuben liner with a displacement of 14.7 thousand tons, adapted for a hospital ship. On board were 2,680 wounded servicemen, 100 soldiers, about 900 refugees, 270 military medical personnel and 285 crew members. Of these, 659 people were saved, of which the wounded were about 350. In the Soviet version of the General Steuben, they called it an auxiliary cruiser, and Marinesko initially mistook it for the light cruiser Emden. In terms of tonnage sunk and the total number of dead, the Marinesko campaign turned out to be the most successful among all Soviet submarines. It is worth noting that in terms of the number of people who died on one ship, the record for the Soviet Navy was the sinking of the Norwegian ship Goya on the night of April 17, 1945 by the crew of the L-3 submarine of Captain 3rd Rank Vladimir (Wulf) Konstantinovich Konovalov, who was awarded for this feat title of Hero of the Soviet

Union. Together with the Goya, about 6.3 thousand soldiers and refugees died. Only 195 people

survived. Neither the Gustloff nor the Steuben were marked with red cross banners, like ships carrying the wounded and refugees. There were anti-aircraft guns and military personnel on board, and the Gustloff was in the convoy. All this made both ships legitimate military targets.

On the eve of the campaign, which ended with the sinking of the Gustloff, Marinesko left without permission for three days in the Finnish port of Turku, where he drank with the local population. The command wanted to put him on trial, but decided to give him the opportunity to atone for his guilt and sent him on a campaign that ended with the sinking of the Gustloff. Therefore, the presentation to the title of Hero of the Soviet Union was reduced at the headquarters of the Baltic Fleet to the Order of the Red Banner, which Marinesko was awarded. On September 14, 1945, by order of the People's Commissar of the Fleet, Admiral Nikolai Kuznetsov, for negligence, systematic drunkenness and everyday decay, Marinesko was demoted from captains of the 3rd rank to senior lieutenant, and on November 20 he was transferred to the reserve. In 1960 he was reinstated in the rank of captain of the 3rd rank. Marinesko died in 1963. May 5, 1990 he was awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union.

## The myth of the war crimes of the Red Army in Germany

It was customary in the USSR to deny that the Red Army had committed numerous war crimes in Germany and other liberated European countries. In Soviet historiography, it was emphasized that Soviet soldiers in every possible way took care of the civilian population of Germany and provided them with food. Only individual excesses caused by a sense of revenge were muffled. In January 1945, during the Vistula-Oder and East Prussian operations, a large-scale invasion of Soviet troops into Germany began. It was accompanied by numerous crimes both against German prisoners of war and against the civilian German population. On January 12, 1945, the commander of the 3rd Belorussian Front, General Ivan Chernyakhovsky, issued the following order: "We went two thousand kilometers forward and saw the destruction of everything that we had created in twenty years. Now we are standing at the lair, from where the fascist invaders attacked us. We won't stop until we clear it.

There will be no mercy for anyone, just as there was no mercy for us. It is impossible to demand from the soldiers of the Red Army that they spare the enemy. They burn with hatred and vengeance. The land of the fascists must become as deserted as our land became after them. Fascists must die, just as our soldiers died.

The first victim of violence by the Red Army was East Prussia. There was especially a lot of violence and murder. Here is what the artist Leonid Rabichev, in the 45th lieutenant, who fought in East Prussia, writes, for example, in his memoirs: "Women, mothers and their daughters lie to the right and left along the highway, and in front of each stands a cackling armada of pants down. Those who are bleeding and losing consciousness

are dragged aside, children who rush to help them are shot. Cackle, growl, laughter, cries and groans. And their commanders, their majors and colonels stand on the highway, who laughs, and who conducts -

No, it's more of a regulation. This is so that all their soldiers, without exception, participate. No, not mutual responsibility and not revenge on the damned occupiers at all - this hellish deadly group sex. Permissiveness, impunity, impersonality and cruel logic of the distraught crowd...”

On May 17, 1939, the population of East Prussia was 2,341,394, including 3,169 Jews. After the war, in 1945-1946, about 100,000 Germans were deported by the Soviet authorities. In total, about 20% of the population of the Reich was mobilized into the Wehrmacht. In agricultural East Prussia, this proportion could be even higher. If we assume that about 500 thousand immigrants from East Prussia served in the Wehrmacht, then the number of civilians can be estimated at about 1840 thousand people. It turns out that about 1,740 thousand of them became refugees or died from the bombing of allied aircraft, during ground combat operations, or were killed by the Red Army. The goal was largely achieved - the territory of East Prussia was almost completely liberated from the Germans even before the end of the war. A former Red Army officer, Lieutenant Colonel Sabik Vogulov, who served in the rear automobile service on the 1st Belorussian Front,

and after the war deserted to the western zones of German occupation, testifies: “Like a whirlwind, like a hurricane of revenge, Russian troops broke into German territory. It was truly a fiery bloody flurry. If earlier on Russian soil, in Poland, generals and officers held back presumptuous and brutalized soldiers, then here no one could do anything - and did not want to do anything. On the contrary, many officers and generals themselves set an example of how not to treat a defeated enemy, leaving the most terrible crimes without investigation and without consequences.

The main motive for this situation was: to give people feel the sweetness of revenge on the enemy for the desecration of the Motherland.

And the results quickly showed up: from the eastern borders of Germany to the Oder, from the Baltic to the Carpathians - the entire German territory was engulfed in conflagrations, violence, robberies and murders ...

It was felt that a strong, strong army was heading towards disintegration, that this disintegration was beginning to embrace the advanced units,

whose officers managed to transport German women in closed cars, even to the Oder bridgehead. To justify

the murders and violence against women, a myth was born in the Soviet troops that the Germans created "avenger battalions" from the widows and sisters of soldiers who fell at

the front. According to estimates by German historians and journalists, based on data from medical institutions and morgues in Berlin, about 200,000 women were raped in the capital of the Reich alone (most of those who became pregnant turned to abortion clinics), and about 10,000 of them were killed by Red Army soldiers or committed suicide. For the whole of East Germany, including the territories subsequently transferred to Poland and the USSR, this figure rises to 2 million raped and 100,000 killed. This estimate, the only one for today, of course, does not claim to be absolute accuracy, it can both significantly overestimate and underestimate the number of victims of violence, despite the fact that no one counted the number of civilians killed and raped in hot pursuit. In different regions of Germany that were under Soviet occupation, the number of raped and killed could be different. And the accuracy of the given estimates, largely based on the testimony of witnesses, is not too high. But still there is no doubt that the number of those raped was measured in hundreds of thousands or millions, and the number of those killed - in tens or hundreds of thousands.

A lot of excesses happened in the armies of the Western allies who came to Germany. However, the allied command relatively quickly restored order. In the American army, for example, 69 servicemen were executed for the rape of German women by the verdicts of the tribunals. Similar excesses were in the British and especially in the French (the French took revenge on the Germans for the defeat in 1940 and the four-year occupation) army. But even there they were quickly suppressed by the most severe measures. Sometimes a much

greater number of evidence of the crimes of the Red Army, in comparison with the same evidence of the crimes of soldiers of the Western Allies, is explained by the influence of Goebbels' propaganda. Say, Goebbels sought to intimidate the soldiers and the population with wild Bolshevik hordes, so that the soldiers would fight harder, and the population would not remain under Soviet rule.



occupation. However, then it becomes completely incomprehensible why Goebbels did not use such an effective means to force German soldiers to fight hard against the Anglo-American troops on the Western Front. After all, he was especially worried that in the last weeks of the war the Germans willingly surrendered to the British and Americans. But Goebbels did not speak of American or British atrocities. There were an order of magnitude more facts of "Soviet atrocities" reported by the surviving refugees, and only they could become effective propaganda material.

In the Red Army, 4,148 military personnel were sentenced by tribunals for rape, robbery and murder of the civilian German population, mainly to be sent to a penal battalion, a fortress, or to imprisonment. Many were shot without trial at the scene of the crime. The fundamental difference between the behavior of the

soldiers of the Western armies and the Red Army in Germany was not only in the scale of violence, but also in the fact that the Americans, British and French raped, but very rarely killed their victims. For Soviet soldiers, the murders of civilian Germans, and not only Germans, but, for example, prisoners of war who fell into their hands or French or Poles driven away for forced labor were commonplace.

phenomenon.

There was also an economic reason that determined the difference in the behavior of the Red Army and the military personnel of the American and British armies in relation to the civilian population. American soldiers were supplied much better than Soviet ones. They had a cash allowance in full-weight dollars. They could buy a German woman for a pair of stockings or a pack of cigarettes. The Red Army soldiers themselves did not have enough tobacco. They often had nothing to offer a woman but a meager ration. This is also why the Red Army men more often took German women by force.

Soviet soldiers were driven not only by revenge, and not so much by revenge. After all, the same excesses that so clearly manifested themselves in Germany were characteristic of the Red Army in other European countries - in Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia, etc.

Serbs have never fought against Russia. And the Red Army, although it stayed in Serbia for only a month, managed to perform in full

program. The Yugoslav communist authorities collected data on 121 rapes, of which 111 were followed by murder, and 1204 cases of robbery with injuries. These figures are quite impressive, given that the Red Army was in the northeastern part of Yugoslavia for only about a month. But when the Yugoslav delegation on April 11, 1945, reported on the crimes of the Red Army soldiers at a meeting with Stalin, he replied: "Imagine a person who is fighting from Stalingrad to Belgrade - thousands of kilometers across his devastated land, seeing the death of his comrades and closest people! Can such a person react normally? And what's wrong if he fools around with a woman after such horrors? You imagined the Red Army as ideal. But it is not ideal and would not be ideal even if it did not contain a certain percentage of criminal elements - we opened prisons and took everyone into the army.

The behavior of Soviet soldiers in Germany and the Europe they liberated was determined both by a sense of revenge and by the fact that the soldiers and officers of the Red Army were well aware that their bodies were paving the way to victory. They guessed that a soldier's life was not valued so cheaply in any other army participating in the war. And, breaking out of the borders of their country, they took out their anger on both the prisoners and the civilian population. Both prisoners and civilians were killed primarily for the fact that they remained alive, but tomorrow we are destined for almost certain death in battle. And at the same time they raped, robbed, destroyed, taking out their anger on life and on the authorities, against which they did not dare to speak out. And they were also angry that abroad, not even in the richest Serbia, they still live incomparably better than in the Soviet "collective farm paradise". And they also robbed because they lived much poorer than the same Americans or British. For Americans, for example, the same bicycles were of no value; in America they were in great abundance. In the same way, American and British officers and soldiers would not have thought to take German cars home, since they had their own. Therefore, captured vehicles were used only for the needs of the occupation administration. American soldiers, like the Red Army, appreciated German watches, but only good ones. And yet it cannot be said that in the western zones of occupation the German population practically

there are no hours left, as happened in the Soviet zone of occupation. And the prisoners, with rare exceptions, were not shot by the Western allies. And

Stalin understood perfectly well that it would be better to give this spontaneous hatred an outlet for foreigners, primarily, of course, for the Germans, so that this hatred and anger would not break through inside the country. Only when it became clear that the excesses were disintegrating the Red Army, which was rapidly losing combat effectiveness, did Stalin take measures to stop the killings, robberies and rapes of the civilian German population, although all this completely stopped only at the

end of 1945-beginning of 1946. The level of violence on the part of the Red Army was determined by the presence of real forces on the ground that could withstand excesses on their part. For example, in Poland the level of these excesses was much lower than in Germany, since there were two armies of the Polish Army in the country and anti-communist partisans were still active. The same thing happened in Courland and Lithuania, where the "forest brothers" immediately began an active partisan struggle and thus prevented the widespread excesses on the part of the Soviet troops. On the contrary, there were no resistance forces left in defeated Germany and Hungary, and Soviet soldiers could practically do whatever

they wanted there. The order of the Military Council of the 2nd Belorussian Front No. 006 dated January 22, 1945, with which it was required to familiarize the entire command staff up to and including platoon commanders, stated that the seizure of large stocks of alcohol tempted the soldiers to "excessive alcohol consumption", and along with "robbery, looting, arson" - the murders were silent - now mass drunkenness is observed everywhere, in which even officers participated. Rokossovsky demanded "to burn out these shameful phenomena for the Red Army with a red-hot iron", to bring to justice those responsible for robberies and drunkenness and punish them up to execution, to establish "exemplary order and iron discipline in the shortest possible time" in all military units. Rokossovsky also recalled that "the enemy must be destroyed in battle, and those who surrender

must be taken prisoner." However, the order of Rokossovsky, like similar orders of other front commanders who demanded an end to robberies, violence

murders and threatening the most severe punishments, up to execution on the spot, largely remained on paper. Mutual responsibility reigned among the servicemen, and the commanders in every way shielded their subordinates, accused of crimes against the Germans. Putting things in order was very difficult and sometimes even dangerous for those who tried to do it.

On April 20, 1945, the Stavka issued a directive to the 1st Belorussian and 1st Ukrainian fronts "On changing the attitude towards German prisoners of war and the civilian population", where it demanded a more humane treatment of the Germans, which should have reduced their

stubbornness in defense. After that, the front commanders began to more actively fight excesses against prisoners and civilians. Marshal Konev, for example, shot 40 people in front of the line, accused of murder and rape. Despite

the crimes committed by the Red Army, the Soviet military commandant's offices sought to establish a peaceful life in Germany and create more or less normal conditions for the life of the German population. On April 28, 1945, the first commandant of Berlin, Commander General Nikolai Berzarin, issued his first order, which ordered the population of the city to maintain order and calmness, and the Red Army soldiers were required to "quarter only in places indicated by the military commandants of districts and sections." They were forbidden to "arbitrarily, without the permission of military commandants, evict and resettle residents, confiscate property, valuables and conduct searches from residents of the city." The main task of the Soviet military commandant's offices both in Berlin and in and throughout the occupied territory was to provide the population with food. In general, this problem was solved, although the Germans lived from hand to mouth for a long time and the cards were bought below the established norms, especially for meat, fats and sugar.

## Myth "Werewolf"

The myth of the Werewolf organization, created in the last weeks of the war by Nazi propaganda and reflected in post-war historiography, said that it was a powerful underground movement capable of inflicting significant damage on both Soviet and Anglo-American troops, and German collaborators collaborating with it. As early as September 19, 1944, SS-

Obergruppenführer Richard Hildebrandt wrote a memorandum to Himmler, which proposed the creation of an SS partisan detachment in the rear of the advancing Red Army. He proposed for him the name "Werewolf" (werewolf), which he borrowed from the novel by Hermann Lens about the struggle of a partisan detachment operating during the Thirty Years' War in the Lüneberg Heath. Himmler approved the idea and instructed the organization of the Wehrwolf detachments to SS Obergruppenführer Hans Adolf Prützmann, who created a special bureau. However, the preparation of conditions for the activities of partisan detachments ran into one insoluble contradiction. Since Hitler demanded to defend to the last opportunity, any preparation of secret warehouses with weapons and food for the Werewolf could be considered defeatism. This was practically not done until the very last weeks of the war. In addition, the Wehrmacht was experiencing an ever-growing shortage of both food and ammunition. Therefore, the generals were not eager to share their meager resources with the Werewolf. The Luftwaffe practically could not supply the detachments operating behind enemy lines due to the complete dominance of Allied aviation and the lack of fuel.

Only on April 2, 1945, Goebbels officially announced the start of the Werewolf. Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, who was retired, commented on this: "On April 1, it was reported on the radio that the Werewolf had received an order to begin military operations in the German territories occupied by the enemy. This means that the leadership called for war on the civilian population! I don't know if they would have resorted to this measure if I had

leadership of the country at such a time and in such a situation. In practice, only youths of 14–16 years old, old men, and also women could enter the Werewolf, since all other men were mobilized into the army or the Volkssturm. It was also assumed that one of the encircled soldiers could join the Werewolf detachments, but then they had one goal - to avoid Russian captivity if possible and surrender to the British or Americans.

In the last days of the war, werewolves distributed leaflets threatening collaborators: "We will punish every traitor and his family. Our revenge will be deadly!" However, their actual ability to do so was very limited. Also, the main slogan of the Werewolf could not be realized: "Let's turn the day into night, and the night into day! Beat the enemy wherever you meet him! Be smart! Steal weapons, ammunition and food from the enemy! German women, help the Werewolf fight wherever possible!" Within a month after the start of the fighting actions of the Werewolf, the Nazi state collapsed. On May 1, Dönitz, whose goal was the surrender of as many German troops as possible to the Western Allies, issued an order to stop the Werewolf. Prünzmann committed suicide in a prison in Lüneburg on 21 May 1945. Separate detachments fought after May 2, but, deprived of centralized leadership and supplies, they could not inflict great damage on the occupying forces. Werewolves were armed activities with small arms, mostly found on the battlefield, and faustpatrons. They attacked individual vehicles and convoys of allied troops, as well as individual military personnel and small patrols. At the same time, they almost did not engage in sabotage on transport and other infrastructure, both because of the lack of explosives and the lack of qualified sappers. In the Soviet zone of occupation, the werewolves, except for Berzarin, in the period after May 9 and until the end of July 1945, killed 7 Soviet burgomasters of military personnel, allegedly staged a train wreck with dismantled equipment sent to the USSR. In the western zones of occupation, the werewolves killed 5 of the 7 chief mayors of the Rhineland.

On June 16, 1945, the first Soviet commandant of Berlin, Colonel General Nikolai Erastovich Berzarin, died, according to the official version, in a car accident. According to another version, he became a victim of an assassination attempt by members of the Werewolf using grenades. "Werewolf" also managed to make several successful assassination attempts on senior officers of the Red Army and the armies of the Western Allies. The most high-profile action of the Werewolf was the assassination of Franz Oppenhof, appointed by the Allies, Mayor of Aachen on March 25, 1945. This act was reflected in the Nazi officialdom "Völkischer Beobachter", which reported: "Four freedom fighters killed an American mercenary who had forgotten about the honor." There was no one to report Berzarin's murder. Captured members of the Werewolf or suspected of belonging to the organization were most often

shot. But soon the activities of the Werewolf, which did not receive outside support and did not enjoy special sympathy from the German population, mortally tired of the war and starving, came to naught. In addition, Nazi Party activists were interned by the Allied forces. And the high concentration of occupation troops in Germany hindered the development of partisan struggle. Separate actions of werewolves served as an excuse for repressions against the civilian population, including uncontrolled violence. The last actions of "Werewolf" were noted in 1946. Werewolf population is unknown.

## The myth of Germany's surrender

The main myth associated with the unconditional surrender of Germany lies in the assertion, common in Soviet historiography, that the surrender signed by the Chief of Staff of the Operational Command of the OKW, General Alfred Jodl, at the Headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces in the West, General Dwight Eisenhower in Reims on May 7, 1945, was a separate and an inferior act, surrender only to the troops of the Western Allies, and a real surrender, which really ended the Second World War in Europe, was the surrender signed on the night of May 9 in the Berlin suburb of Karlshorst by the Chief of Staff of the OKW, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel.

The first capitulation in Reims on the part of the Western Allies was signed by Eisenhower's chief of staff, General Walter Bedel Smith, and on the Soviet side, by the representative of the Soviet Headquarters of the Supreme High Command at Eisenhower's headquarters, General Ivan Alekseevich Susloparov. On behalf of France, the document was signed as a witness by General Francois Sevez, on behalf of Germany, except for Jodl, the surrender was signed by the commander-in-chief of the German fleet, General Admiral Hans-Georg von Friedeburg. The signing ceremony of the Act of Unconditional Surrender of Germany took place on May 7 at 2:40 am CET. Susloparov recalled that he sent a request to Moscow with a request to be allowed to sign the act of surrender, but by the time of signing the answer had not yet arrived. Therefore, Susloparov, at his own peril and risk, signed the Act of Surrender, making a reservation in the text that it is possible to organize a new ceremony for signing

the Act of Surrender, if one of the allied states requires it. The capitulation of Nazi Germany, according to the Act signed in Reims, came into force on May 8 at 23.01 (CET) (in Moscow at that time it was one in the morning). From that time on, all German troops were to cease resistance and surrender to the allied forces.



Moscow instructions forbidding him to sign any documents of surrender. However, learning that the unconditional surrender had been signed, Stalin was not too upset. If he had rejected the Reims Act, Germany would have received an excuse to continue hostilities against the Soviet troops and, if necessary, move additional Wehrmacht units into the western zones of occupation of Germany and Austria, as well as into the area occupied by American troops in the Czech Republic. , and thereby significantly reduce the number of prisoners taken by the Red Army. Therefore, Stalin demanded only to organize a second ceremony of signing the Act of Unconditional Surrender. According to Deputy Chief of the General Staff Sergei Shtemenko, Stalin declared: "The treaty signed by the Allies in Reims cannot be canceled, but it cannot be recognized either. Surrender must be committed as the most important historical fact and accepted not on the territory of the victors, but where the fascist aggression came from: in Berlin, and not unilaterally, but necessarily by the supreme command of all countries of the anti-Hitler coalition. Let it be signed by one of the leaders of the former fascist state or a whole group of Nazis responsible for all their atrocities against humanity."

The second ceremony took place in the Berlin suburb of Karlshorst on the night of May 9th. At the same time, the text of the surrender has not changed, since it has already been published by US President Harry Truman and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. From the side of the Wehrmacht, in addition to Keitel, it was signed by Friedeburg and the Chief of the General Staff of the Luftwaffe, Colonel-General Jurgen Stumpf. On the Soviet side, the act was signed by Marshal Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov, the commander-in-chief of the Soviet occupation zone in Germany and the commander-in-chief of the Soviet occupation forces. Eisenhower's Deputy Air Chief Marshal Arthur William Tedder put his signature on behalf of the United States and Britain. As witnesses, the act was signed by the commander of the US strategic air forces, General Charles Spaatz, and the commander-in-chief of the French army, General Jean-Marie Gabriel de Lattre de Tassigny. The signing of the act took place at 22:43 CET (0.43 Moscow time). It came into force at 23.01 CET,

as agreed in Reims, and immediately after the signing of the surrender in Reims, the German command began to send relevant directives to the troops. The capitulation at Reims was no less real and universal than the capitulation at Karlshorst. In Western Europe, the United States and most countries of the Anti-Hitler coalition, the end of World War II (or Victory Day) is celebrated on May 8, the day when the unconditional surrender of Germany came into force. In the USSR, Russia and most post-Soviet states, Victory Day is celebrated on May 9, referring to the day of signing (Moscow time) the Act of Unconditional Surrender in Karlshorst.

## The myth of military losses of the USSR in World War II

The official figures of the irretrievable losses of the Red Army in the Great Patriotic War - 8,668,400 who died on the battlefield, died from wounds, diseases, in captivity, were shot by tribunals and died for other reasons - were first published in 1993 in the collection "Secrecy Removed", are a myth that is very common in modern Russian and foreign historiography and underestimate the true value by about three times. The official estimate of the total Soviet population of 26.6-27.0 million people, published at the same time, of which about 18 million are civilians, is also significantly underestimated. In those cases where the data of the book "Secrecy Removed" is possible to verify, they do not stand up to scrutiny. So, according

to the data of this book, on July 5, 1943, by the beginning of the Battle of Kursk, the troops of the Central Front numbered 738 thousand people, and during the defensive battle through July 11, inclusive, they lost dead and missing, according to the collection "Secret Class Removed", 15,336 people and 18,561 wounded and sick. By the time the Red Army went on the offensive on Orel, on July 12, the composition of the troops of the Central Front had not changed much: one tank brigades arrived and two rifle brigades left. The tank brigade then in the state consisted of 1300 people, and in one rifle brigade there were 4.2 thousand people. With this in mind, by the beginning of the Oryol operation, the Central Front was supposed to have 697 thousand personnel. However, according to the authors of the book "Secrecy Removed", at that moment there were only 645,300 people in Rokossovsky's troops. This means that the true losses of the Central Front in the defensive battle near Kursk were at least 51.7 thousand more than official statistics claim. And this is only on the condition that the troops of the Central Front did not receive marching reinforcements during the defensive operation. If such a replenishment was received, then

real losses should have been even higher. So many people could not immediately desert or simply disappear to who knows where, and even in the conditions of fierce battles and in the treeless Kursk steppes! It should

be emphasized that the main part of the underestimated Soviet losses should have been irretrievable losses, primarily the missing, since the wounded admitted to hospitals were counted much more accurately than the dead. If the entire underestimation is attributed to irretrievable losses, then in the case of the Central Front they will turn out to be 4.4 times more than the official ones.

The underestimation of irretrievable losses is just as great in the case of the two Polish armies in the Berlin operation. According to the collection "Secrecy Removed", they are identified in 2825 killed and missing. However, official Polish data says that in this operation, the 1st and 2nd armies of the Polish Army lost 7.2 thousand killed and 3.8 thousand missing, and a total of 11.0 thousand people, which is 3, 9 times higher than the Soviet (Russian) official data. It is absolutely unbelievable that the Poles were counted less accurately than the Soviet soldiers themselves, since the headquarters of the Polish armies were dominated by Soviet officers. In the East

Pomeranian operation, which lasted from February 10 to April 4, 1945, the 1st Army of the Polish Army lost, according to official Russian data, 2575 killed and missing. However, according to Polish data, the losses of this army amounted to 5.4 thousand killed and 2.8 thousand missing. This gives 8.2 thousand people of irretrievable losses, which is 3.2 times more than the official Russian calculation of Polish losses in the East Pomeranian operation. Accordingly, the overall Russian estimate of all Soviet and Polish irretrievable losses in this operation should be increased by 3.2 times - from 55,315 to 176,149 people. Let's try to calculate how many times Russian data on

Polish losses in two other major operations, the Belorussian and Vistula-Oder, are underestimated. In total, Polish losses on the Soviet German front amounted to 17.5 thousand killed and 10 thousand missing. It is known that in the battle near Lenino in October 1943, the 1st Polish division named after Kosciuszko lost 496 killed and 519 missing. In the battles for Warsaw

suburb of Prague in September 1944, the 1st Polish Army lost 355 killed, and in the battles for the bridgehead on the western bank of the Vistula near Warsaw in the same month - 1987 killed and missing. Let us subtract these losses from the total losses, as well as losses in the East Pomeranian (8.2 thousand) and Berlin operations (11 thousand). Then it turns out that during the Belarusian and Vistula-Oder operations, the losses of the 1st Polish Army amounted to about 4.9 thousand dead and missing, while, according to the collection "Secrecy Removed", the Poles lost 1533 killed in the Belarusian operation and missing, and in the Vistula-Oder operation - only 225 people. Thus, in these two operations, the Polish deadweight losses were also reduced by 2.8 times.

An interesting pattern is observed. The greater the losses, the more they were underestimated. In the Berlin operation, the losses were the greatest, exceeding four times, per day, the losses in the East Pomeranian operation. And the understatement turned out to be the largest - 3.9 times. But when the Polish losses in the Vistula-Oder operation turned out to be very small (the 1st Polish army was advancing on Warsaw, which the Germans left without a fight), the underestimation of losses was the smallest. And the coefficient of this underestimation, by the way, could not be extended to all the troops participating in the Vistula-Oder operation. But in the Belarusian operation, Polish losses were probably underestimated by a little more than 2.8 times. I think that the irretrievable losses of the Red Army during the war are also underestimated by about three times on average. By the way, only by accepting that the Soviet irretrievable losses in the operations to liberate Poland are underestimated by the authors of the book "Secrecy Removed" at least twice, you can get the traditional figure of more than 600 thousand Soviet soldiers who died for the liberation

of Poland. To determine the true value of the irretrievable losses of the Red Army, another method can be proposed. Considering that in smaller battles the undercounting of losses could be smaller, we assume that the total undercounting of irretrievable losses in the collection "Classified" was at least three times. Its authors determine the total amount of irretrievable losses, taking into account the prisoners who returned home and the missing, at 11,144 thousand people. Of these, it is necessary to exclude 1,658 thousand deaths from wounds and diseases

and accidents and shot by the tribunals and committed suicide. If the resulting number is multiplied by 3 and subtracting 2,776,000 returned prisoners and missing, and again adding 1,658,000 dead, it turns out that about 27,340,000 soldiers of the Red Army died in total. From this we must deduct approximately 250,000 Soviet prisoners of war who ended up in exile. The total number of deaths will decrease to 27,090 thousand, which is almost the same as my estimate of 26.9 million Soviet military dead. Accounting for irretrievable losses in the Red Army was put extremely

badly. The order of the Deputy People's Commissar of Defense, Army Commissar of the 1st rank, Yefim Shchadenko, dated April 12, 1942, stated: "Accounting for personnel, especially accounting for losses, is completely unsatisfactory in the army ... The headquarters of the formations are not sent in a timely manner to the center of the nominal lists of the dead. As a result of the untimely and incomplete submission of lists of losses by the military units (as in the document. - **B.S.**), there was a large discrepancy between the data of numerical and personal accounting of losses. At present, no more than one third of the actual number of those killed is on a personal record. The personal records of the missing and captured are even more far from the truth." And on March 7, 1945, Stalin, in an order for the People's Commissariat of Defense, emphasized that "the military councils of the fronts, armies and military districts do not pay due attention" to the issues of personal accounting for irretrievable losses. To assess the true size of the irretrievable losses of the Red Army, we can take as

a basis the data published by Russian military historian General Dmitry Volkogonov on the irretrievable losses of the Red Army by months of 1942 and compare them with the monthly breakdown of the losses of the Red Army wounded (hit in battles) for the period that we have at our disposal. from July 1941 to April 1945, expressed as a percentage of the average monthly level for the war. It is given in the book of the former head of the Main Military Sanitary Directorate of the Red Army, Yefim Smirnov, "War and military medicine." Contrary to popular belief, the monthly dynamics of casualties by the wounded indicates that in the last year or two of the war, losses

The Red Army has by no means diminished. Wounded losses peaked in July and August 1943, amounting to 143 and 172% of the monthly average. The next largest maximum falls on July and August 1944, reaching 132 and 140%, respectively. Losses in March and April 1945 were only slightly less, amounting to 122 and 118%. This figure was higher only in August 1942, in October 1943, and in January and September 1944 (130% each), and also in September 1943 (137%).

One can try to estimate the total number of dead, assuming the number of those killed in battle is approximately directly proportional to the number of wounded. It remains to be determined when the record of irretrievable losses was most complete and when almost all irretrievable losses fell on the dead, and not on the prisoners. For a number of reasons, November should be chosen as such a month, when the Red Army suffered almost no losses in prisoners, and the front line was stable until the 19th. Then she, according to Volkogonov, lost 413 thousand killed and died from wounds. This number will account for 83% of those killed in battles, i.e., for 1% of the average monthly number of casualties in battles, there are approximately 5 thousand killed and died from wounds and diseases. If we take January, February, March or April as the baseline, then there the ratio, after excluding the approximate number of prisoners, will be even greater - from 5.1 to 5.5 thousand dead per 1% of the average monthly number of those killed in

battles. The total number of those who died in battle, as well as those who died from wounds, can be estimated by multiplying 5 thousand people by 4656 (the sum, as a percentage of the monthly average, casualties for the war, taking into account the losses of June 1941 and May 1945), at 23.28 million people. From here it is necessary to subtract 940 thousand who returned to their encirclement from among the missing. 22.34 million people will remain. It can be assumed that in the data cited by Volkogonov, non-combat losses are not classified as irretrievable, i.e., soldiers who died from diseases, accidents, suicides, were shot by tribunals and died for other reasons (except those who died in captivity). According to the latest estimate of the authors of the book "Secrecy Removed", non-combat losses of the Red Army amounted to 555.5 thousand people. Then the total irretrievable losses of the Soviet

captivity) can be estimated at 22.9 million people. If non-combat losses are included in Volkogonov's figures, then the irretrievable losses of the Red Army can be estimated at 22.34 million dead. To obtain a final figure for military casualties, it is also necessary to estimate the number of

Soviet prisoners of war who died in captivity. According to the final German documents, 5754 thousand prisoners of war were taken on the Eastern Front, including 3355 thousand in 1941, while the authors of the document presented to the Western allies in May 45 stipulated that for 1944-1945 the accounting of prisoners incomplete. At the same time, the number of deaths in captivity was estimated at 3.3 million people. However, I am inclined to join the higher estimate of the total number of Soviet prisoners of war in 1941 at 3.9 million people contained in German documents from early 1942. Undoubtedly, this number also included approximately 200 thousand prisoners from the occupied territories, released from the camps back in 1941. We must also take into account the prisoners taken by Germany's allies. Finland captured 68 thousand prisoners, of which 19,276 died - about 30%. Romania captured up to 160 thousand Soviet prisoners and handed over tens of thousands more to Germany. A total of 82,090 prisoners were registered in Romania. By the time of liberation in August 1944, 59,856 people remained in the camps. 5221 people died in captivity. 3331 prisoners fled. In 1943, 13,682 natives of Transnistria, which was included in Romania, were released from the camps. In addition, at the beginning of the war, about 80 thousand natives of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina were released from captivity. In the future, some of them were again drafted into the Red Army. Hungary and Italy transferred their Soviet prisoners to Germany. Taking into account all these factors, the total number of Soviet prisoners of war can be estimated at 6.3 million people. 1,836 thousand people returned to their homeland from German (as well as Finnish and Romanian) captivity, and about 250 thousand more, according to the USSR Foreign Ministry in 1956, remained in the West after the war. The total number of those killed in captivity can be estimated at about 4 million people, and the total number of those who returned from captivity - at 2.3 million people, including those who managed to hide their captivity. The proportion of the dead is 63.5% of the total number of prisoners. The total losses of the Soviet Armed Forces can be estimated at 26.9 million people. Got here



collaborationist formations. According to some estimates, up to 1.5 million Soviet citizens served in the Wehrmacht, SS and police formations. Of these, up to 800 thousand were "Khivi" - "voluntary assistants" who served in the Wehrmacht and the SS troops in non-combat positions.

The particularly high death rate of prisoners in both German and Soviet captivity was due to the fact that both the Wehrmacht and the Red Army fought to the limit of their capabilities and experienced an acute shortage of food. The number of the German land army on the Eastern Front in 1941 was 3.3 million people, and it captured 3.9 million Red Army soldiers. The Germans could not feed such a number of people for at least several months, before they were transferred to rear camps in Poland and Germany. There was an order from the High Command of the German Ground Forces that the commandants of the transit camps could take up to 20% of food from passing German units for the needs of prisoners, but in the face of a sharp shortage of food from the Wehrmacht, this order remained on paper. The occupied Soviet territories also experienced an acute food shortage, which was typical for many of them even before the war and was aggravated by the German occupation forces carried out for the needs of the army and the Reich. The fact that the transport was used primarily for the needs of the front did not allow the prisoners to be quickly transferred to the rear. As a result, prisoners died in large numbers from starvation and epidemics, as well as during unbearable foot crossings, especially in winter conditions. As a result, out of 3.9 million Soviet prisoners by the spring of 1942, only 1.1 million survived in the camps. Several hundred thousand were liberated from the camps and enrolled in the Wehrmacht or the occupation authorities, a number of prisoners fled, and more than 2 million died. Since the Soviet Union did not sign the Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War, Germany refused to extend it to Soviet prisoners of war. At the beginning of the war, the Soviet side announced that it would adhere to the rules for the treatment of prisoners, with the exception of the points on the exchange of lists of prisoners and the receipt by prisoners of parcels through the Red Cross. Germany on such selective use of the convention is not

agreed and stated that she did not consider herself bound by the terms of the Geneva Convention in her treatment of Soviet prisoners, and, in particular, widely used their forced labor, not observing the food supply standards established by the convention. Only by the summer of 1943 did the calorie content of the ration of a Soviet prisoner of war employed in the metallurgical or mining industry in Germany reach 2100 kilocalories. And in August 1944, the norms for supplying prisoners of war and foreign workers were equalized with the norms for supplying the German population. But before that time, not so many Soviet prisoners survived.

The net conscription to the Red Army, minus those returned to the national economy, can be estimated at 42.9 million people. In Germany, including the peacetime army, the total draft was 17.9 million. Of these, approximately 2 million were called back, primarily to work in industry, so that the net conscription was about 15.9 million, or 19.7% of the total Reich population of 80.6 million in 1939. In the USSR, the share of net conscription could reach 20.5% of the population in the middle of 1941, estimated at 209.3 million people. Official data on the number of those mobilized into the Red Army were significantly underestimated due to the fact that a significant part of the Red Army soldiers were mobilized directly to the units and did not fall into the data of the centralized account of the mobilized. For example, only the Southern Front in September 1943 called directly into the unit 115 thousand people. This conscription continued until the last days of the war - at the expense of the released "Ostarbeiters" and prisoners of war. Among such untrained conscripts, many of whom were drafted from the occupied territories and considered as if they were second-class citizens, irretrievable losses were especially great, and accounting for them was the worst. The number of dead Red Army soldiers can also be estimated on the basis of the data

bank at the Museum of the Great Patriotic War on Poklonnaya Gora. In the mid-1990s, it contained the personal names of 19 million military personnel who died or went missing during the war. Not all the dead were included here, as evidenced by the failures of dozens of citizens who applied in the first days of the museum's existence with inquiries about the fate of

their missing relatives and friends, and at the same time, many people were mentioned in the bank two or more times. It is practically impossible to establish by name all those who died in the war, half a century after it ended. Of the approximately 5,000 dead Soviet servicemen whose remains were found by Russian search engines in the mid-1990s and whose identity was established, about 30% were not listed in the archives of the Ministry of Defense and therefore did not end up in a computer data bank. Assuming that the 19 million people who got into this bank account for approximately 70% of all dead and missing, their total number should reach 27.1 million people. From this number, approximately 2 million surviving prisoners and approximately 900 thousand who returned to their encirclement must be subtracted. Then the total number of dead soldiers and officers can be calculated at 24.2 million. However, this calculation is inaccurate, since it is impossible to determine with any accuracy both the proportion of irretrievable losses that did not fall into the data bank and the number of doublet records. Therefore, the figure of 26.9 million dead in the ranks of the Soviet armed forces should be considered closer to the truth. It should be said that this is only a probabilistic estimate and its accuracy is plus or minus 5 million people. However, it is unlikely that we will ever be able to calculate the losses of the Red Army

This figure is obtained if we take the official figure of all irretrievable losses, including the surviving prisoners and encirclement, at 11,144 thousand people and assume that this is the third of the real irretrievable losses that were on personal records. Of these, it is necessary to exclude 1,658 thousand who died from wounds, diseases and accidents and were shot by tribunals and committed suicide. If the resulting number is multiplied by 3 and subtracting 2,776,000 returned prisoners and missing, and again adding 1,658,000 dead, it turns out that about 27,340,000 soldiers of the Red Army died in total. From this we must deduct approximately 250,000 Soviet prisoners of war who ended up in exile. The total number of deaths will decrease to 27,090 thousand, which is almost the same as our estimate of 26.9 million Soviet military dead. The total losses - both the military and the civilian population of the USSR - can be estimated

at 42.7 million people, based on the estimate of the Central Statistical Bureau made in the early 50s, the population of the USSR at the end

1945 to 167 million people, from natural and mechanical population growth in 1945-1946, including due to the expansion of Soviet territory, due to which the population should be reduced to 166.6 million people, and from an estimate of the CSO made in June 41st, the population of the USSR at the beginning of 1941 was 198.7 million people. Taking into account the recalculation, which was done only for Moldova and the Khabarovsk Territory, this last number should be increased by 4.6%. Consequently, the size of the Soviet population at the beginning of the war can be considered 209.3 million people. Civilian losses can be estimated at 15.8 million people, subtracting military losses of 26.9 million from 42.7 million people. These people became victims of repression by the German authorities (about 1.5 million Soviet citizens were killed during the "final solution of the Jewish question" alone), died during hostilities, as well as from starvation and disease both in the occupied and non-occupied territories, in particular in besieged Leningrad.

Also, some of the civilians became victims of repression by the Soviet authorities. The number of victims during the deportation of the "punished peoples" and the death rate in the Gulag can be estimated at no less than 1 million people. It should be pointed out that the figure of the losses of the Red Army was determined by us with a greater degree of accuracy than the total value of Soviet losses and, accordingly, the value of the losses of the civilian population. If ever the population of the USSR in the middle of 1941 is determined to be less than 209.7 million people, the number of victims among the civilian population will also decrease by a corresponding amount.

It should also be emphasized that in the Red Army the number of dead and the number of wounded were close to each other. It is rather difficult to establish the exact number of wounded in the Soviet armed forces, since different sources appear with different figures, and it is not always clear to which category of the wounded this or that figure belongs. It is possible that the figure of 19.7 million wounded is closest to the truth. It is obtained if we take the data that as a result of injuries, 16% of the wounded were dismissed from the army. These data are contained in a 1946 report on the work of the rear during the war years. If we take the data on the number of Red Army soldiers dismissed due to injury from the "Secret Classification Removed" in 3050.7 thousand, then the total number of wou

True, if we take the Grif data on the number of deaths from wounds - 1104.1 thousand people and assume that those who died from wounds make up 6.5% of the total number of wounded, as shown in the 1946 report, then the total number of wounded it will turn out to be only 16,986.2 thousand. But we assume that the figure of dismissed disabled people is more reliable, since if they underestimated, then in the first place - the number of those who died from wounds. In this case, we are actually talking about the number of wounds, and not the wounded, since many fighters were wounded more than once. The number of patients shown in the "Secret Classified Removed" at 7,641.3 thousand people, of which 86.7% returned to duty, seems to me close to the truth (according to the 1946 report, more than 85% of patients returned to duty). In this case, the total number of wounded and sick can be estimated at 26,708.2 thousand people. At the same time, the number of wounded turns out to be even less than the number of those killed on the battlefield, which, according to our estimates, amounted to 22.34 million people. The ratio is not 3:1, as is traditionally believed, but 0.85:1. This paradox is easily explained. The wounded had little chance of being carried from the battlefield, and most of them died without waiting for help. As noted in a 1946 report, "the losses of porters in some formations reached 80-85% killed and wounded from enemy fire." It is clear that with such losses among the orderlies, there were no less losses among the attackers, so that most of the wounded could not be taken out of the battlefield. In addition, unlike the Wehrmacht, in the Red Army, a significant part of the porters were women, who found it very difficult to pull out a wounded soldier. The women were sent as nurses in order to release

the men as active bayonets to take part in the attacks. There are other data about Soviet losses in the wounded and sick. The archives of the Military Medical Museum in St. Petersburg have preserved more than 32 million records of servicemen who entered military medical institutions during the Great Patriotic War. We are talking here about those who were evacuated to field and rear medical facilities, since there are no personal records for those who died or recovered in medical battalions and regimental medical posts. If we assume that the undercount equally applied to both the wounded and the sick, then the total number

can be estimated at 9.2 million sick and 22.8 million injured. Then the number of wounded and killed will be almost equal to each other - 1.02:1.

It must be emphasized that Soviet irretrievable losses are practically impossible to estimate by the number of burials. Firstly, most of the graves were fraternal, and it is impossible to determine exactly how many fighters were buried in one grave. Secondly, many graves, including those at the end of the war, were not marked at all. For example, in the order to the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front on the shortcomings in the burial of military personnel dated February 5, 1945, it was specifically noted: "The corpses of military personnel are buried out of time, special graves are not torn off, but are used for graves: trenches, trenches, cracks and bomb funnels. The graves are not filled up and covered with sod. There are no grave columns indicating the names of the dead, there are no diagrams of the geographical location of mass and individual graves.

## The myth of German military losses in World War II

The main myth of Germany's military losses, cultivated in Soviet times, was the assertion that Germany's losses on the Soviet-German front were quite comparable to the losses of the Red Army. In this regard, the figure of German losses in killed and captured was put into circulation at 13.6 million people, of which 10 million people allegedly died or were captured on the Eastern Front. In fact, these figures in no way reflect both

the total irretrievable losses of the Wehrmacht and the losses on the Soviet-German front. The total losses of the Wehrmacht who died on the battlefield and died from other causes, according to an estimate made by the German historian General Burkhardt Müller-Gillebrand (during the war years, he was in charge of accounting for personnel), amounted to about 3.2 million people. Another 0.8 million people died in captivity. Of these, about half a million did not survive captivity in the East, where a total of about 3.15 million German troops were captured. In the West, out of approximately 8 million prisoners, about 300,000 died. Based on the Müller-Hillebrand data, we estimate the number of German soldiers killed in the East at 2.1 million people, and taking into account those who died in captivity, 2.6 million people. The Müller-Hillebrand data are based on a centralized accounting of German losses up to November 1944 and on an estimate of losses for the last half a year made by the German General Staff, verified by a selective post-war survey of the population in individual German states.

In the USSR, where there were cases of starvation in the Red Army, and among the civilian population of the eastern regions there were even cases of cannibalism, in reality there were no necessary food resources to supply millions of prisoners. No less important in the refusal to comply with the relevant clause of the Geneva Convention was the fact that Stalin considered the prisoners, at worst, traitors to the Motherland, and at best, soldiers who could not be used until the end of the war, and therefore, for

achieving victory they are useless. As a result, the captured Red Army soldiers were deprived of the opportunity to receive assistance from their homeland and were largely doomed to starvation.

The same problems that Germany experienced with Soviet prisoners experienced the Soviet Union with German prisoners and their allies. While there were few prisoners (before the start of the counter-offensive at Stalingrad - less than 20 thousand), it was possible to keep them in full accordance with the Geneva Convention and brag about it to the whole world. But when the Soviet troops, in the course of the counteroffensive and liquidation of the group surrounded in Stalingrad, captured more than 150 thousand prisoners within two and a half months, most of them frostbitten and emaciated, insoluble problems immediately arose, primarily in terms of providing the prisoners with food, warm clothing and medicines. As a result, from the beginning of the war, by May 1, 1943, 196,944 people, or 67.3%, out of 292,630 registered prisoners, died in the camps and reception centers of the NKVD. This was a consequence of the fact that hunger reigned in the country and too low food standards were set for the prisoners. The calorie content of the daily ration of prisoners of war was 1750 kilocalories, and for working prisoners - 1945 kcal, which did not cover the energy costs of a person, even at rest, especially in winter conditions. Lack of food led to dystrophy and beriberi. These diseases then accounted for 70% of other diseases and were the cause of 80% of all deaths. The calorie content of the ration increased to 2200 kilocalories only in the second half of 1943, which already made it possible to avoid starvation. For example, a little more than 10 thousand Italian prisoners returned home out of a total of 45 thousand people (according to other estimates, even 70 thousand), and half of the prisoners died of dystrophy, that is, from malnutrition. Even in May 1945, of all Italians who fell ill, 60% suffered from dystrophy. The USSR and Germany waged a fierce war to the limit of their capabilities,

and neither the Russians nor the Germans could allocate the necessary food for the large masses of prisoners - otherwise, starvation would have threatened their own populations and the armies of both countries.



The German military historian Rüdiger Overmans' estimate of the Wehrmacht's irretrievable losses of 5.3 million appears to be too high. Overmans' calculations are based on data from a centralized card index of dead German servicemen of the FRG. Here, 3.1 million people are people who undoubtedly died at the front or died in captivity. There are reports or eyewitness reports about them. 2.2 million is the number of military personnel about whom, at the time the request was received by the tracing service, it could not be reliably established that they were alive. However, some of these soldiers, especially among the wounded and disabled, could well have died after the war from natural causes, while others could not be found due to a change of residence, especially if they lived in the GDR or Austria, as well as due to emigration. to other countries. Some of them could appear only due to the distortion of the surname. It can be assumed that the survivors could be up to half of the 2.2 million unidentified missing. Therefore, the most probable value of the irretrievable losses of the Wehrmacht in World War II should be considered the estimate of 4 million dead, given by Müller Hillebrand. The ratio of Soviet and German losses on the Eastern Front is thus approximately 10:1. Interestingly, it turns out to be only a little more than the ratio

of irretrievable losses in the second half of 1916 between the tsarist army and the German troops on the Northern and Western fronts, where it was 7:1.

According to the calculations of the Russian historian S. G. Nelipovich, in the period from May 22 (June 4) to December 18 (31), 1916, the troops of the Southwestern Front lost 202.8 thousand soldiers and officers killed, 1091 thousand wounded and missing lead (mainly prisoners) - 152.7 thousand. The total losses amounted to 1,446.3 thousand people. Austro-Hungarian troops during the same period in operations against the Southwestern Front, as well as in the battle near Baranovichi with the troops of the Western Front and on the Romanian Front, lost 45 thousand soldiers and officers killed, 216.5 thousand wounded and about 378 thousand. prisoners. The losses of the German troops operating on the Eastern Front reached approximately 38 thousand prisoners

killed and 195.5 thousand wounded. Turkish troops operating against the Southwestern Front and on the Romanian Front lost about 10 thousand killed, wounded and captured. In total, in the Southwestern Front, the Central Powers lost 846 thousand people, including 66.2 thousand killed, 360 thousand wounded, and 409.8 thousand prisoners. The overall loss ratio was in favor of the Central Powers - 1.7:1. The ratio of prisoners was in favor of the Russian troops - 2.7: 1. On the other hand, there were 3.3 times fewer killed in the armies of the Central Powers than in the Russian army, and 3.6 times fewer wounded. But on other fronts, the loss ratio was even worse for Russia. The total losses of Russian troops here amounted to 594 thousand people, including 60 thousand killed, 472 thousand wounded and 62 thousand missing. To this we must add the loss of the Romanian army 17 thousand killed, 56 thousand wounded and 237 thousand missing. The Central Powers lost 7,700 killed, 52,000 wounded and 6,100 missing. In addition, German and Bulgarian troops lost 8,000 killed, 40,000 wounded and 3,000 missing in Rumania. The overall ratio of losses is 7.5:1, and for those killed and captured - 15.2:1. Even if we exclude the losses of the Romanian front, then the Russian losses will amount to 54 thousand killed, 443.6 thousand wounded and 42.4 thousand missing. Then the ratio of total losses will be 8.2:1, and for irretrievable losses - 7:1. The real ratio was somewhat more favorable for the Central Powers, since the losses of Austria-Hungary on the Romanian front were not deducted here. According to the same Nelipovich, during the Gorlitsky breakthrough by the Austro-Hungarian troops of the Russian Southwestern Front in May 1915, the ratio of irretrievable losses was even less favorable for the Russian side - 15:1.

In World War I, German troops fought against the Russians several times more effectively than the Austro-Hungarian ones. The combat readiness of the latter was undermined by the instability and unwillingness to fight the Czech, Slovak, Serbian and Romanian regiments. In the fight against the German troops, the Russian troops were never able to carry out a single successful operation. All battles ended either in victory for the Germans or in a draw. Both the superiority of the Germans in artillery, including due to a much better supply of shells, and the superiority of the Germans in

training of fighters and commanders. Russian officers, who were well trained in theory, were poorly versed in the practice of command and control in specific combat conditions. It should also be noted that during the Second World War, the Romanian troops were an analogue of the Austro-Hungarian army on the Russian front. The losses of the Romanian army in killed were approximately equal to the losses of the Soviet troops

opposing it. One can also estimate the ratio of Soviet and German losses by the losses of officers, who are always considered more accurately than privates. According to the data cited by Müller-Gillebrand, the ground army lost in the East from June 1941 to November 1944 65.2 thousand officers dead and missing. The total irretrievable losses of the Wehrmacht amounted to 2,417 thousand people over the same period. Thus, for one killed officer, there were 36 privates and non-commissioned officers. The share of officers in these losses is 2.7%. The irretrievable losses of officers of the Soviet ground forces, according to estimates completed only in 1963, amounted to 973 thousand. If we exclude from this figure the sergeants and foremen who held officer positions, as well as the losses of 1945, then the irretrievable losses of officers of the Soviet ground forces for 1941-1944 years, minus the political composition, absent in the Wehrmacht, as well as administrative (commander) and legal personnel, represented by officials among the Germans, will amount to about 784 thousand. These 784 thousand must be compared with 65.2 thousand German losses officers brought from Müller Hillebrand. This results in a ratio of 11.2:1. It is close to the ratio of the losses of the dead armies of the USSR and Germany. In the irretrievable losses of individual units of the Red Army, the ratio of soldiers and officers was close to what existed in the Wehrmacht. For example, for the period of December 17–19, 1941, in the 323rd Rifle Division, the loss of commanding personnel among those killed and missing amounted to 3.36%, which gives a ratio of 28.8:1, and minus the political and quartermaster staff - 36: 1. For the 48th Rifle Corps of the 69th Army in the period from July 1 to July 16, 1943, these ratios will be 17.2:1 and 19.9:1. And the 193rd Guards Regiment of the 66th Guards Division from July 10 to October 9, 1943, without taking into account possible replenishment, lost

56 officers and 1554 sergeants and privates were killed and wounded, which gives a ratio between soldiers and officers of 27.8: 1. Meanwhile, on July 10, by the time the regiment entered the battle, there were 2022 sergeants and soldiers for 197 officers, which gives a ratio of 10.3: 1. Taking into account the fact that by the beginning of the fighting there were more officers in the regiment than required by the state, in the possible replenishment the share of officers was probably lower than their share in losses, so the actual ratio of soldiers and officers in losses

could be more than 28: 1. Since in the German army all orderlies were men, and in the Red Army almost exclusively women, a German soldier wounded on the battlefield was much more likely than a Red Army soldier to be evacuated from the battlefield. Also, the total number of those killed in battle in the Red Army was an order of magnitude greater than in the Wehrmacht. As a result, a much larger part of the Red Army died on the battlefield without waiting for help. Therefore, in the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War, the number of those killed on the battlefield was close to the number of wounded, while in the Wehrmacht there were on average 3-4 wounded per one killed on the battlefield.

It is not possible to accurately estimate the total losses of Germany who died during the Second World War. If the losses of the Wehrmacht can be estimated at 4 million people, including here also the Austrians, Alsatians, Sudeten Germans and other foreigners who fought in the Wehrmacht, then the losses of the civilian population are incalculable. It has only been established that about 538 thousand civilians within the borders of Germany in 1937 became victims of the bombing of the Anglo-American aviation of German cities, and about 40 thousand more in Austria, Alsace-Lorraine and the Sudetenland. The total losses of the German and Austrian civilian population, including victims of Nazi repression, Jews killed as part of the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question", bombing victims, and those who died during the fighting in Germany and Austria in 1944-1945 or fell victim to starvation in the last months of the war, different researchers estimate from 2 to 3 million people. With this in mind, the total losses of Germany and Austria in World War II can be estimated at 6-7 million people. However, these estimates are extremely

approximate. Demographically, the balance of the pre-war and post-war population of Germany and Austria cannot be drawn up due to the movement to Germany of almost 12 million Germans from the eastern German lands, torn from it in 1945, as well as from the states of Eastern Europe. 272 thousand Germans were interned in the USSR from among the former activists of the Nazi Party, policemen, representatives of the "exploiting classes" who worked to restore the Soviet economy. Of these, 66.5 thousand died.

# The myth of the atomic bombing of Japan

The main myth associated with the American atomic bombings of Japan in August 1945 is the assertion that they had no military significance, since Japan would have capitulated in the very near future due to the Soviet Union entering the war with it. In Soviet historiography, the opinion was strengthened that the atomic bombing of Japan was undertaken by the United States in order to intimidate the USSR. The prevailing opinion in America is that the atomic bombings hastened Japan's surrender by several months and thereby reduced the casualties that both the Japanese and their opponents would inevitably have suffered in those months. In Japan, on the other hand, the prevailing opinion is that the atomic bombings were a senseless cruelty, since Japan's position was hopeless and the Japanese government was looking for a way out of the war. The atomic bombing of Japan was caused by the refusal of the Japanese government to accept the

terms of the Potsdam Declaration, which contained the terms of unconditional surrender. The United States spent more than \$2 billion on the nuclear project (more than \$22 billion in today's prices). Hiroshima was chosen as the first target due to its large size, as well as the fact that it was the location of a significant number of Japanese troops and was surrounded by hills, which have a "focusing effect". The fact that the city had not previously been subjected to air raids also played a role. On the morning of August 6, 1945, the American B-29 Enola Gay bomber, under the command of Colonel Paul Tibbets, dropped the Little Boy atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later, on the morning of August 9, the atomic bomb "Fat Man" ("Fat Man") was dropped on the city of Nagasaki by a B-29 "Boxcar" bomber under the command of Major Charles Sweeney, who flew for the first time in this capacity. Initially, he was supposed to carry out the bombing of the city of Kokura, but due to dense cloud cover, the pilot had to direct the aircraft to an alternate target - Nagasaki, a major seaport and center of the military industry.

The power of the first atomic bombs was 20 kilotons. Immediately after the bombing of Nagasaki, the Japanese government agreed to accept the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. It is easy to see that cities that were of strategic importance and far from the most populated were chosen as targets, so that there was no special goal to maximize the number of victims when planning atomic bombings, which, of course, does not make atomic weapons any less barbaric and inhuman means of warfare. At the same time, the Targeting Committee rejected the idea of using atomic bombs against purely military targets not surrounded by a large urban area, since there was a great risk of missing, and psychological pressure on Japan would be effective if a significant number of civilians were killed.

According to an estimate made in February 1946 by the headquarters of the American occupying army in Japan, about 140 thousand people died from the atomic explosion and its consequences in Hiroshima, and about 74 thousand people in Nagasaki. How many people died from radiation sickness after February 1946 and how many newborns were victims of genetic mutations, there are no reliable estimates.

The question remains how much the atomic bombings hastened the surrender of Japan. At the same time, the very fact that the surrender was a direct consequence of the atomic bombings is beyond doubt. Already 3 hours after the bombing of Nagasaki, the Japanese Cabinet of Ministers gathered for an emergency meeting and on the same day prepared a document on Japan's consent to accept the terms of the Potsdam Declaration, which contained the terms of Japan's unconditional surrender. The debate is only about how many more weeks or months Japan could hold out if there were no atomic bombings. The Soviet invasion of Manchuria and the defeat of the Kwantung Army are unlikely to have had a significant impact on the Japanese surrender. Indeed, right up to the entry of the USSR into the war, the Japanese authorities counted on Soviet mediation in achieving peace, but only after they managed to repel the American invasion of the Japanese islands. The Japanese command still did not have the opportunity to transfer the Kwantung Army to protect the Japanese Islands.

The American fleet dominated the sea, and aviation in the air, besides, the Japanese had almost no fuel left. In addition, practically all modern weapons and the most combat-ready divisions have already been withdrawn from the Kwantung Army for the fronts in the Pacific Ocean and for the defense of Japan. As for

the plans of the American command, it considered it possible to land on Kyushu on November 1, 1945, and on the largest Japanese island of Honshu on March 1, 1946, after which they hoped to end the war before the end of the year. The minimum losses during the landing and subsequent battles were estimated at 250,000 American soldiers dead, the maximum at 400,000. In light of what became known about the Japanese armed forces after the surrender, all these estimates look grossly overestimated. The Japanese no longer had serious means of countering the American landing, and it is quite possible that surrender would have followed as early as November 45, after landing on Kyushu. However, there is no doubt that even before the landings began, tens of thousands of civilians would have been bombed by conventional bombs, and after the landings, tens of thousands of American and Japanese soldiers and civilians would have died in battles and from air strikes. And the decision to use atomic bombs was made when they planned to fight with Japan for another year and a half.



## The myth of the Soviet-Japanese war

The main myth of the Soviet-Japanese war, reflected in Soviet propaganda and historiography, is the assertion that the Soviet Union started the war against Japan in full accordance with international law and that the defeat of the Kwantung Army was an outstanding achievement of Soviet military art and the Red Army had to overcome the stubborn and fierce Japanese resistance.

Planning for a war against Japan began in the fall of 1944. On April 5, 1945, the USSR denounced the Soviet-Japanese neutrality pact concluded in Moscow on April 13, 1941. According to the terms of the treaty, even after the denunciation, it was supposed to operate for a year, which somewhat disorientated the Japanese side regarding the possible timing of the Soviet attack. During the Potsdam

Conference, Stalin reaffirmed his commitment at Yalta to declare war on Japan no later than three months after Germany's surrender. On July 26, the leaders of the United States, Britain and China signed the Potsdam Declaration, which demanded unconditional surrender from Japan. The Japanese government rejected the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. On August 8, the Soviet government issued a statement in which it noted: "The demand of the three powers - the United States of America, Great Britain and China - dated July 26 of this year for the unconditional surrender of the Japanese armed forces was rejected by Japan. Thus, the proposal of the Japanese government to the Soviet Union to mediate in the war in the Far East loses all ground ... True to its allied duty, the Soviet government accepted the proposal of the allies and acceded to the Declaration of the Allied Powers of July 26

this year ...

Considering Japan's refusal to capitulate, the Allies turned to the Soviet government with a proposal to join the war against Japanese aggression and thereby shorten the end of the war, reduce the number of victims and help restore world peace as soon as possible. The statement also stated that

that the entry of the USSR into the war with Japan aims "to enable the Japanese people to get rid of those dangers and destruction that were experienced by Germany after its refusal of unconditional surrender."

This statement contained a declaration of war on Japan from midnight on 9 August. The application was handed over to the Japanese Ambassador in Moscow, Naotake Sato, at 5 p.m. on 8 August. In Japan and Transbaikalia at that time it was already midnight. An hour later, at midnight, Soviet aircraft began to bomb targets in Manchuria, and ten minutes later the troops of the Trans-Baikal Front crossed the border. The Japanese learned about the declaration of war only at 4 o'clock in the morning from a Moscow radio broadcast. The telegram from the embassy in Moscow never reached Tokyo. Thus, in fact, the USSR attacked Japan even before the declaration of war. It is characteristic that Stalin determined the exact time of the beginning of the invasion at 16.30 Moscow time, after receiving the news of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. He understood that he had to hurry, because Japan would not hold out

for long now and very soon there would be no one to fight with. The Manchurian operation was carried out by the troops of the Trans-Baikal Front, Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, the 1st Far Eastern Front, Marshal Kirill Meretskov, and the 2nd Far Eastern Front, General Maxim Purkaev, with the support of the ships of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Ivan Yumashev. The Soviet troops numbered 1,747 thousand people, of which 1,378 thousand people were in the land army. They had 5250 tanks and self-propelled guns and 5171 combat aircraft. In addition, the allied Mongolian army numbering about 16 thousand people operated on the Soviet side. The general management of the operation was carried out by Marshal Alexander Vasilevsky, Commander-in-Chief of the Far East.

Japanese troops numbered 713 thousand people, of which only 357.5 thousand people were in combat units. About 200 thousand more people were in Korea, on South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands and were also subordinate to the headquarters of the Kwantung Army. The Japanese grouping did not have a single combat-ready aircraft due to the lack of fuel and trained pilots, and our aces could not demonstrate their skills in air combat (Japanese anti-aircraft gunners shot down 78 Soviet aircraft) and had only about 600

tanks. The command of the Kwantung Army was subordinated to the army of Manchukuo, the troops of the Japanese ally in Inner Mongolia, Prince Dewan, and the Suiyuan Army Group. However, the troops allied with Japan, even before August 45, were disbanded due to their unreliability, and the weapons seized from them were used to equip the newly formed Japanese divisions. There was almost no heavy artillery in the Japanese troops, and there was an acute shortage of fuel and ammunition. More than half of the personnel were untrained recruits of younger ages and limited fit recruits of older ages. The new formations formed from them replaced the personnel divisions and brigades transferred to the South Seas region, to South China and for the defense of the Japanese metropolis.

The Kwantung Army could not resist the overwhelming Soviet superiority in people and technology. It must be said that the Japanese command was not particularly worried about the fate of the troops in Manchuria, realizing their doom. Japan still did not have a fleet and air force left to transfer the Kwantung Army to protect the Japanese islands. For the same reason, it was impossible to use the industrial potential of Manchuria for the defense of Japan. The fact that Manchuria had no military significance for Japan at that time is proved by the fact that Tokyo was ready to return to Moscow not only South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, but also Dalny with Port Arthur, and also agreed to the demilitarization of South Manchuria. For these concessions, the USSR only had to mediate between Japan and the Western allies in the matter of ending the war. But this proposal remained unanswered.

The plan of the Manchurian offensive operation was, according to Vasilevsky, to simultaneously deliver from Transbaikalia, Primorye and the Amur region both main and auxiliary strikes on directions converging to the center of Northeast China. In this way, the main forces of the Kwantung Army could be cut and routed piece by piece.

An acute shortage of fuel deprived the command of the Kwantung Army of the ability to carry out quick maneuvers and a timely withdrawal. And on August 10, the Japanese government decided to accept the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. As the minister recalled

Foreign Affairs of Japan Togo Shigenori, "now, after the atomic bombing and the entry of the Russians into the war against Japan, no one objected in principle to the adoption of the Declaration." The entry of the USSR into the war with Japan meant that all hopes for Soviet mediation in achieving peace collapsed. The atomic bombings showed by what means the Americans would suppress the "total resistance" on the Japanese islands, which were threatened by the Japanese leadership.

On the Trans-Baikal Front, advancing through the Greater Khingan Range in Inner Mongolia, 70% of rifle troops and up to 90% of tanks and artillery were concentrated in the direction of the main attack. The 6th Guards Tank Army of General Andrei Kravchenko overcame the Greater Khingan on the move and broke into the center of Manchuria, having covered 450 km in three days without a fight. Then they had to stop due to a lack of fuel, which, following the example of the Germans, was transferred to the tankers by transport aircraft. Such a high rate of advance of the Red Army was also facilitated by the order of the headquarters of the Kwantung Army not to engage in battles, but to retreat to the defensive line in the center of Manchuria in order to preserve manpower and military equipment, creating only separate pockets of resistance to delay the Soviet troops.

In the period from August 9 to 14, the troops of the Trans-Baikal Front, having struck at the enemy from the Tamtsak-Bulak region in the eastern part of the MPR, wedged into the territory of Manchuria, with the support of the MPR troops through the Great Khingan, broke through to the capital of Manchukuo, the city of Chanchun and entered into interaction with the troops

of the 1st Far Eastern Front. This front from the region of the Grodekovo railway station near Vladivostok on August 9, bypassing the enemy fortified areas, dealt the main blow in the direction of Girin in Central Manchuria. By August 14, the troops of the 1st Far Eastern Front advanced to a depth of 200 km and captured a strong grouping of Japanese troops in the Mudajiang area. The right flank of the 1st Far Eastern Front advanced on Harbin to connect with the troops of the 2nd Far Eastern Front, marching from the Amur region along the river. Sungari with the support of the Amur Flotilla. On August 10, they occupied Tongjiang, on August 13, Fujin, and on August 17, Jiamusi.

By the evening of August 14, after the landings of the Pacific Fleet in the Korean ports of Yuki and Rasin and the sinking of a large number of Japanese ships, the Kwantung Army was cut off from the mother country. Japanese resistance virtually ceased. The

Commander-in-Chief of the Kwantung Army, General Otsuzo Yamada, already on August 12 gave the order to withdraw from Central Manchuria to a fortified area on the Manchurian-Korean border. Thus, the defense of the Japanese troops was completely disorganized, and they were unable to offer serious resistance in the Changchun area. On August 16, the headquarters of the Kwantung Army ordered a complete cessation of resistance. Thus, the battles of the Soviet and Japanese troops in Manchuria lasted only a week, and they were not very large-scale, since the Japanese retreated all the time, hiding behind the rearguards. During the

Manchurian operation, including the landings on South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, Soviet troops, according to official figures, lost 12,031 killed and missing, 24,425 wounded and sick, as well as 78 tanks and self-propelled guns, 232 guns and mortars and 62 aircraft. Data on irretrievable losses in people may be underestimated. There is no reliable data on Japanese losses in killed and wounded. The Red Army captured about 641,000 Japanese troops, including 16,000 Chinese, 10,000 Koreans, and about 4,000 Mongols. Of this number, more than 65,000 wounded and sick were released shortly after the end of hostilities in Manchuria. Taking into account such a number of wounded and sick, the number of those killed in the Kwantung Army could have been 3–4 times less, i.e., about 15–20 thousand people, which was not much higher than the Soviet losses in killed. Approximately 200 thousand people from the Kwantung Army surrendered to American troops in South Korea.

Soviet troops arrested up to a million civilian Japanese citizens living in Manchuria - members of the families of military personnel, employees of the civil administration, businessmen, etc. About 511 thousand Japanese prisoners of war were returned to Japan, 20 thousand people were transferred to Mongolia, about one thousand people were transferred to China and about 62 thousand Japanese prisoners of war died in Soviet camps. According to Japanese estimates, in the Sovi

about 80 thousand prisoners of war died in the camps. Accurate data on deaths among Japanese civilians are not

available. During the Manchurian operation, many Soviet soldiers, sadly, stained themselves with war crimes, although their scale was much smaller than in Germany. This was preserved evidence of Western representatives who visited the territories occupied by Soviet troops. First of all, the Japanese civilian population living in Northeast China was killed, raped and robbed. The Chinese, who suffered during the years of Japanese occupation, also dealt with the Japanese colonists. But the Red Army soldiers were more cruel. According to the memoirs of one of the surviving Japanese, "... if you ran into the Manchus (Chinese), they took everything from you. But the most terrible were the Red Army. They killed the Japanese just for the sake of killing. I saw many corpses pierced with bayonets. Mountains and mountains of bodies..."

On August 14, near the Gegenmyao station in Manchuria, the Red Army killed about 1,000 Japanese refugees from the echelon detained there. In total, according to Japanese estimates, the Red Army killed about 11 thousand Japanese civilians in Manchuria. And on August 22, after the surrender, Soviet submarines L-12 and L-19 sank the Taito-maru, Ogasawara-maru and Shinko-maru-2 transports with refugees from Sakhalin. More than 1700 people died. On the way back to Sakhalin, L-19 also sank. The Japanese ships sailed with lights on, guided by the instructions of the American command, according to which Japanese ships with lights on, American submarines would not attack. But the American instruction is not a decree for Soviet submariners. Not only Japanese

refugees became victims of the Red Army. The Chinese got it too. The head of the American mission, which arrived in Shenyang (Mukden) to repatriate American prisoners, reported: "The Russians surpassed the Chinese in robbery, looting and rape. Women are raped at bus stops, railway stations and sometimes right on the streets. Rumor has it that the local authorities are ordered to supply a certain number of women to the Soviet command every night. As a result, women shave their heads, cover their faces with ink and put on bandages to look as small as possible.

attractive ... Red Army soldiers are engaged only in robberies and murders. And they are not only robbing the Japanese. Some soldiers wear a dozen wristwatches at once... Among the Soviet military, I happened to meet decent people, but these are only one in ten." And the American naval attache under the government of Chiang Kai-shek, having visited Manchuria, recalled that "Russian soldiers broke into houses and took away everything except furniture. Then a military truck drove up and took away the furniture. Soviet officers usually did not pay attention to the robberies perpetrated by their subordinates, and often they themselves participated in them. And in the Chinese city of Pingchuan, according to the testimony of local residents, "Soviet soldiers take away wristwatches from people and shoot those who refuse to submit to robbery. The Red Army demands women from peasants. The Red Army soldiers shot a peasant and two workers who could not find women for them to satisfy their lust." Even the Chinese Communists protested that "the Red Army is engaged in things that are not befitting a proletarian army, including rape and expropriation of food supplies from the peasants." Of course, there could be no question of any sense of revenge towards

the Japanese, and even more so the Chinese. The main reasons for the crimes were the same as in Europe: anger at the fact that the command uses the soldiers as cannon fodder, and the need to take out anger on someone defenseless, as well as hatred for the relatively prosperous life that people live abroad . But these were excesses on the part of individuals. And the export of almost all industrial equipment and stocks

of raw materials and food from Northeast China and North Korea to the USSR became a state policy, since all enterprises here were Japanese property. What did the Chinese and Koreans do wrong before Stalin?

## The myth of Japan's surrender

The main myth of the Japanese surrender is that Japanese resistance ended only with the signing in Tokyo Bay aboard the Missouri of the Act of Unconditional Surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945. From Japan, the act of surrender was signed by Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru and Chief of the General Staff Umezu Yoshijiro. On behalf of the Allied Powers, the Act was signed by the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, General Douglas MacArthur.

In fact, on the night of August 10, the government of Japan, at the request of Emperor Hirohito, unanimously approved the decision to accept the Potsdam Declaration, subject to the preservation of imperial power. "Now after the atomic bombing and the entry of the Russians into the war against Japan," wrote Japanese Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo, "no one objected in principle to the adoption of the Declaration." On August 10, a note on the adoption of

the Potsdam Declaration was sent to the United States. The Chinese representatives were also acquainted with its contents. On August 13, an American response was received, which indicated that the form of government in the country would be established on the basis of the free will of the Japanese people. On August 14, a meeting of the government and the high command of the army and navy was convened in the emperor's bomb shelter, at which the emperor presented a draft of his rescript on the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Armed Forces on the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. The military were against it, but the rescript was approved by the majority of cabinet members, and on August 15 its text was sent to the United States, and on the same day the emperor made a radio address on the unconditional surrender of the Japanese armed forces. After that, the Minister of War, the commanders of the army and navy, and a number of other top military leaders committed hara-kiri.

After receiving by radio on the night of August 14 the emperor's rescript on surrender, the commander of the Kwantung Army, General Yamada, received a telegram signed by the Minister of War and



Chief of the General Staff of Japan with an order to continue hostilities until a special order is received. On August 16, Yamada, based on the imperial rescript, decided to stop the resistance and turned on the radio to Marshal Vasilevsky with a statement of surrender. On August 17, General Hata, Chief of Staff of the Kwantung Army, made the same statement to the Soviet consul in Harbin. By a directive dated August 16, Yamada ordered the Japanese troops in Manchuria and Korea, as well as the troops of Manchukuo, to immediately cease hostilities, gather in places of deployment, and in large cities - on the outskirts and, when Soviet troops appeared, surrender their positions and weapons assembled in advance, not allowing damage to military property and weapons, food and fodder.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Forces in the Far East, General Douglas MacArthur, already on August 16 gave the order to cease hostilities on all fronts. He issued a directive on the cessation of hostilities against Japan and, as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the Allied Powers, handed it over to the Chief of Staff of the Red Army, General Antonov, but he replied that he could only begin to act on the orders of his Supreme Commander. Stalin decided to continue the offensive and disarm the Japanese troops throughout the territory, which, by agreement with the Allies, was the sphere of operations of the Soviet troops, including South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. Therefore, Vasilevsky gave Yamada a radiogram, which stated: "... Japanese troops launched a counteroffensive on a number of sectors of the Soviet-Japanese front. I propose to the Commander of the Kwantung Army, from 12:00 on August 20, to stop all military operations against the Soviet troops on the entire front, to lay down their arms and surrender. The time period indicated above is given so that the headquarters of the Kwantung Army can communicate the order to cease resistance and surrender to all its troops. As soon as the Japanese troops begin to hand over their weapons, the Soviet troops will cease hostilities.

On August 16, an explanation was published in the Soviet press General Staff of the Red Army, which stated:

"1. The Japanese Emperor's announcement of the surrender of Japan on August 14 is only a general declaration of

unconditional surrender. The

order to the armed forces to cease hostilities has not yet been issued, and the Japanese armed forces are still continuing, therefore, Armed Forces the actual surrender of resistance. The Japanese do not yet exist.

2. The surrender of the Japanese Armed Forces can be considered only from the moment when the Japanese Emperor gives an order to his armed forces to cease hostilities and lay down their arms, and when this order is practically carried out. 3. In view of

the foregoing, the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union in the Far East will continue their offensive operations against Japan. Vasilevsky's meeting with the

command of the Kwantung Army was put off in every possible way. On August 18, at a meeting with representatives of the Soviet command in Shenyang (Mukden), Yamada issued an order to cease hostilities and disarm the Kwantung Army. On the same day, the mass surrender of the Kwantung Army began. And Vasilevsky met with General Khata only on August 19 in Changchun, where the Act of Surrender was signed. Khata obtained from the Soviet command a promise to ensure the safety of the Japanese civilian population in Manchuria and Korea. However, this promise turned out to be empty. Just as false was the telegram from Beria, Bulganin and Antonov to Vasilevsky, which stated: "Prisoners of war of the Japanese-Manchurian army will not be taken to the territory of the USSR. Prisoner-of-war camps should be organized, if possible, in places where the Japanese troops are disarmed... Food for prisoners of war should be carried out according to the standards that exist in the Japanese army stationed in Manchuria at the expense of local resources." This information was intended only to mislead the Japanese command. The execution of the Stalinist plan was facilitated by the order of the headquarters of

the Japanese ground forces, distributed just on August 16. He allowed "to conduct the necessary military operations for the purpose of self-defense, if the enemy tries to continue the offensive." But there was no more resistance. Soviet airborne assault forces landed unhindered in the major cities of Manchuria and North Korea.

According to the bushido code of samurai honor, also popular among other sections of Japanese society, surrender was a disgrace to which a true samurai should have preferred suicide. In order to prevent mass suicides of military personnel, on August 18, an order was issued by the headquarters of the Japanese Imperial Army. It stated that military personnel and civilians who find themselves in the hands of the enemy on the basis of the emperor's rescript on the cessation of hostilities on the terms of the Potsdam Declaration would be considered by the Japanese authorities not as prisoners of war, but as internees. The surrender of weapons and submission to the enemy under these conditions is therefore not a full-fledged surrender and does not violate the precepts of bushido. By August 23, the resistance of individual units of the Kwantung Army, which had previously failed to receive an order to surrender, ceased. The struggle was continued only by a few fanatics who did not obey the order to surrender. On Kunashir, Soviet troops landed on September 1, and on the Habomai archipelago - only on September 5, three days after the signing of the Act of Surrender.

The Soviet government violated the point of the Potsdam Declaration, according to which the Japanese soldiers were supposed to return home after disarmament. The USA, England and their allies complied with this point. Stalin did otherwise. At a meeting of the GKO on August 23, 1945, he spoke of the Japanese prisoners in the following way: "They managed enough in the Soviet Far East during the Civil War. Now their militaristic aspirations have come to an end. It's time to pay off your debts. So they will give them away." As a result, a GKO decree was adopted on the placement of more than half a million Japanese prisoners of war on the territory of the USSR and their forced labor.